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JOURNALISM
REVIEW



• The shame game: NBC'S scary *Predator*

Douglas McCollam

• When news is not enough

Mitchell Stephens

• The new Arab conversation

Gal Beckerman

• Why Tribune is like Rumsfeld

The Editors

• *Vanity Fire*

Bree Nordenson

• John Leonard: the enthusiast

Meghan O'Rourke

• Does ownership really matter?

Michael Schudson





February 22, 2007 | Awards Dinner | Washington, D.C.

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— From the founding editorial, 1961

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"If the Jews control the media, they are some of the most self-bating Jews I've ever met."

— the blogger Egyptian Sandmonkey, "The New Arab Conversation," p. 16

EDITORIAL

TIME TO GO

Why Tribune is like Rumsfeld

In the military you shut up and follow orders; otherwise, things fall apart. Still, there can come a point when the strategy is a demonstrable loser. Then, sometimes, it is the generals who must go, or maybe the secretary of defense.

That's true in corporations, too. When the Tribune Company orders manpower cuts, publishers and editors either follow through or hit the road. That's the way it works. Yet there can come a Rumsfeld moment, and Tribune has reached it. That's why we'd like to see the company sell itself out of the newspaper business.

Tribune has had tough luck. It paid dearly — \$8.3 billion — for Times Mirror and then the dot-com bubble promptly burst and sank the stock market; *Newsday* contributed a circulation scandal; the IRS ruled against the company in a \$1 billion dispute; and the courts sent the FCC's plan to relax cross-ownership rules — which Tribune had counted on — back to the drawing board.

But to paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld, you fight the war you've got. Between its eleven dailies — including the *Hartford Courant*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, the *Orlando Sentinel*, *Newsday*, and the *Los Angeles Times* — and its twenty-four TV stations, Tribune claims to reach 80 percent of U.S. households. The idea was to use that size to the company's advantage. First, Tribune would use its TV-print overlaps to create editorial and advertising synergies; second, it would sell national advertising based on its big footprints in New York, Chicago, and L.A.; third, the merger would create efficiencies and the company could cut costs. But Tribune's effort at merging the two cultures was ham-handed at best. And national advertisers, it turned out, didn't see how those three markets made sense as a buy. The only thing left was the easy part — cutting costs.

Good editors will cut costs when it is part of a sensible business plan. But in time Tribune appeared to be simply harvesting the assets of its properties. *Newsday* and others were picked nearly clean and Tribune began turning to L.A. again

this fall. To Jeffrey Johnson and Dean Baquet, the former publisher and former editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, Tribune must have sounded like the motorcycle thugs in Hunter Thompson's first book, *Hell's Angels*. In Thompson's telling, the Angels come up to you in a bar and say, Give me a cigarette. Then: Give me another cigarette. Then: Give me the pack. Give me your shirt. At some point you realize you might as well fight.

Public ownership of newspapers no longer makes the kind of sense it made when the industry was rapidly shedding labor costs thanks to new technology, and when the money that stockholders poured in was invested partly in editorial. Today newspapers need owners with the patience and the guts to ride through this valley of transition, with its attendant economic uncertainty, and find the next high ground, which will probably have something to do with the Internet.

Without such leadership they are in danger, and Baquet's former boss, John Carroll, pointed out the stakes in a recent speech: "There are those who romanticize the decline of big media as a return to our roots as an agrarian nation informed by small newspapers and pamphleteers," he said. "Such nostalgia fails to take into account the across-the-board growth of institutions since those early days. Government has grown. Business has grown. The instruments of public relations and of propaganda have grown. That is why, as a counterweight, we need strong journalistic institutions."

Tribune has great resources, but those resources aren't doing much public good. The company seems less than the sum of its parts. And so, like Rumsfeld, it should go. We'll take our chances with the gaggle of billionaires who are lining up to buy those newspapers. Some of them may turn out to be pirates (see Santa Barbara). But others will be citizens who understand that those dailies are not mere pieces of an economic puzzle but great living institutions rooted in the lives of their cities. **CJR**



LETTERS

ASSIGNMENT: IRAQ

"Into the Abyss" (CJR, November/December) should be required reading in every journalism class from high school to graduate school. I also recommend it for every self-described critic, blogger, pundit, and commentator who has ever suggested that journalists covering the war in Iraq or Afghanistan are cowardly, biased, or uninformed.

CJR's oral history project provides the back stories, personal insights, and vignettes that readers and viewers miss in a thousand-word print article or two-minute TV story.

Journalists covering the war often take the same or greater risks as the soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Like those service members, they are men and women, husbands and wives, and sons and daughters who have voluntarily left their loved ones to go into harm's way. Those journalists who have reported from war zones deserve respect, not derision.

Thanks again for printing their stories.

James W. Crawley
President
Military Reporters and Editors
Washington, D.C.

Thanks for running all the first-person accounts from the brave reporters who went to Iraq.

I wonder, though, whether these emotionally wrenching snippets don't also illustrate one of the tough lessons of the war: that conventional reporting often didn't adequately tell the story. There seems to have been a difference between what these re-



porters saw and what they felt they could report.

Perhaps we need to find a way to allow future war reporters to tell truths that may not fit the "just the facts, ma'am" modality but are nonetheless the way things are on the ground.

Robert Neuwirth
Brooklyn, New York

Your excellent oral history on Iraq was spoiled by your use of the word "staged" in reference to the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Firdos Square. What was staged about it? If you mean that the statue was not pulled down by Iraqis themselves, well, no, it wasn't. But nobody's ever claimed that. I was traveling with the Marine unit that did topple the statue and can tell you that the troops in Firdos Square that day had no idea they were even going to be there until a couple of hours earlier. The decision to topple the statue was made by the battalion commander on the spot. To suggest that this event was somehow

concocted by Hollywood or that the marines were sent to Baghdad after long training in statue toppling is just stupid.

Simon Robinson
South Asia bureau chief
Time magazine
New Delhi, India

The editors respond: The word "staged" was used in the Iraq timeline accompanying "Into the Abyss," and we regret it.

Never in the fifty years that I have been in or around the news business have I read a better record of a historic event than "Into the Abyss." It also poses a fundamental journalistic paradox: Can a story include the details of a reporter's personal experience and maintain journalistic objectivity?

Farnaz Fassihi of *The Wall Street Journal* says, "When I wrote my first-person departure piece, I got thirty-six pages of e-mail. . . . And I couldn't believe people would say, 'We had no idea.' It still gets to me that people say, 'It's that bad in Iraq? We had no idea.' And I'm like, 'What do you mean, you had no idea? How can you think that? . . . Have you been reading my stories? What do you mean?' . . . I don't know why people respond to first-person pieces with, 'Is it really that bad?'"

To Fassihi's questions, I answer, Yes, I've been reading your stories, but "I had no idea." The detail of your first-person piece forced a recognition on me that was never conveyed by the conventional journalism printed in *The Wall Street Journal*. From the details I generalized and now look at the war through different eyes.

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Published by the Columbia University
Graduate School of Journalism

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COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

Journalism Building, 2950 Broadway
Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027

ON THE WEB:

www.cjr.org, www.cjrdaily.org

TO CONTACT US

Editorial: (212) 854-1881

e-mail: CJR@columbia.edu

Advertising: (516) 883-2828

Business: (212) 854-2716

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COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

Who knows? If American
newspapers begin to devote more
space to reporters' personal expe-
riences like "Into the Abyss," they
may even save the newspaper
business.

Reese Schonfeld
Funding president, CNN
New York, New York

There'll be a snow storm in Bagh-
dad before you top this.

Charles A. Krohn
American Battle Monuments
Commission
Arlington, Virginia

The Dart also implies the AP
corrected the story only because
Howard Kurtz referenced it in his
column in *The Washington Post*.
Actually, the Kurtz column
marked the first time the AP be-
came aware the AMA had cor-
rected its report online. Once we
verified that, we immediately is-
sued the correction.

Sarah Nordgren
Director of State News
The Associated Press
Chicago, Illinois

*The editors respond: The AP
seems to be suggesting that if
only the AMA had called its at-
tention to the study's errors, the
AP would have acted sooner. For
the record, while the AP was try-
ing, in no apparent haste, "to
sort out conflicting claims,"
here's what was going on. On
March 14, seven days after the
AP filed its original "Girls Gone
Wild" report, Cliff Zukin, presi-
dent of the American Association
for Public Opinion Research,
began an e-mail exchange with
the AMA about the study's unsci-
entific methods and deceptive
findings. On March 23, the AMA
quietly posted a modified press
release on its Web site. On March
28 and 29, Mystery Pollster,
quoting liberally from the ex-
change between Zukin and the
AMA, posted a blistering, two-
part critique of the study on its
Web site. On April 16, The New
York Times published a correc-
tion. On May 17, Frank Cole-
man, senior vice president of the
Distilled Spirits Council, sent the
AP a packet of materials support-
ing the council's request for a
correction. On May 30, having
been given to understand that no
correction would be forthcoming,
Coleman sent the AP a copy of
Kurtz's May 29 piece. On May
31, the AP issued a correction.*

THAT DAMNED STUDY

The *Columbia Journalism Re-
view's* November/December Dart
to The Associated Press contains
a number of statements that com-
pel a response.

The AP acknowledges there
was a delay in correcting our
story about an American Medical
Association survey on binge
drinking during spring break.
But that delay was caused by our
efforts to sort out conflicting
claims over the accuracy of the
story, not because we were
dodging the issue as you imply.
We did look into the issues first
brought to our attention by a
liquor industry representative. At
the time, we were aware that the
Mystery Pollster blog was ques-
tioning the methods used by the
AMA in conducting its poll, but
the AMA had not acknowledged
any errors.

Your Dart references an AMA
"admission" regarding the survey.
In fact, the AMA simply reposted
the story to its Web site with
modifications to reflect the facts
that the survey was not a random
sample. It did not publicize this
correction or inform the AP, even
though we had questioned the
methodology of the survey.

Columbia Journalism Review (USPS 0804-780) (ISSN 0010-194X) is published bimonthly. Volume XLV,
Number 5 January/February 2007. Copyright © 2007 Columbia University in the City of New York.
Subscription rates: one year \$27.95; two years \$41.95. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y. and
at additional mailing office. Postmaster: send Form 3579 to Columbia Journalism Review,
P.O. Box 578, Mt. Morris, IL 61054.

YOGA IN ACTION

Robert Love has done a phenomenal job of researching and presenting what was available only through the yoga grapevine till now, and that too in bits and pieces (CJR, November/December). As a practicing yogi, Vedic student, and a Hindu I can say this is an excellent demonstration of what Bhagvad Gita describes as "yoga in action." Further, because of its inherent belief in multiple pathways to spirituality, mutual co-existence, duty, and freedom of paths, yoga resonates with American values.

Ravi Pandey
Los Angeles, California


LOCAL RULES!

Why was it so shameful for a newspaper like the *Palo Alto Daily News* to not lead with a terrorist plot — world news — on its front page on August 11 (Darts & Laurels, November/December)? CJR should actually be applauding the *Daily News*, for breaking convention, and for beginning to understand what is going to keep journalism alive: vigorous local coverage and a keen understanding that news consumers no longer rely on one source (the good ole daily) for all of their news.

Jon Whiten
Publisher
City Belt magazine
Jersey City, New Jersey

CLARIFICATION

In a November/December Dart, CJR criticized the *Palo Alto Daily News* for leading its August 11 front page with a story about new sanitary rules for nail salons while relegating to page 11 the world-shaking news of a foiled terrorist plot in Britain. When we took poetic license in describing the paper's page-one policy as being "bound hand and foot" to local news, we should have noted that rare exceptions can be made if and when, in the editor's judgment, circumstances warrant.



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CURRENTS

ISRAELI PAPER, CHRISTIAN EDITION

Israel's alliance with the likes of Pat Robertson, John Hagee, and other U.S. evangelical leaders easily ranks as one of the world's more peculiar pairings.

Yet where some Israelis might simply see odd bedfellows, the *Jerusalem Post's* president and c.e.o., Moshe Bar-Zvi, spotted tens of thousands of potential American readers. Hence, in early 2006 the *Post*, Israel's oldest

English-language daily, rolled out a bold new product: its first-ever Christian edition.

Now, a year later, Bar-Zvi claims the new magazine-style monthly has already brought in 15,000 paid subscribers. "The idea is to create a bridge between Jews and Christians all over the world," says Bar-Zvi, who took over as *Post* president in 2004 after an Israeli business group bought the paper from Conrad Black's scandal-plagued Hollinger International Inc.

Christian readers get a customized mix that includes articles picked up from the daily paper as well as columns and biblical teachings and commentary specifically written for an evangelical audience. One early cover story, for instance, featured the Israeli Ministry of Tourism's plans to build a new Christian heritage park on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Other recent articles have reported on a major

find at an archaeological dig site near Jerusalem, on an Israeli vacation retreat for Holocaust survivors run by German Christian ministers, and on news of alleged Palestinian attacks on Holy Land churches. There have also been items on Israeli Defense Forces' measures to counter a nuclear Iran and on a new Is-

THE JERUSALEM POST

rael Allies Caucus in the U.S. Congress to mobilize Christian support.

"It was obvious to us that there's a substantial audience of people who aren't Jewish but who care about Israel and these issues," says David Horowitz, the *Post's* editor in chief.

Of course, not everyone is so sanguine about this friendship, given that at least some evangelical leaders believe that a strong united Israel is necessary to usher in the Second Coming of Jesus and a world-ending final showdown between good and evil. Horowitz acknowledges that End Times prophecies predicting the annihilation of Jews who don't convert to Christianity have made some Israelis wary. But for now, anyway, he points out that conservative evangelicals are among the country's fiercest defenders, and he's happy to have them as readers. "Here are people who have stood with Israel in difficult times," says Horowitz.

— Susan Hansen

LANGUAGE CORNER

TOO FACILE BY HALF

"Facility" is a graceful, useful word denoting ease, dexterity, fluency, and other attractive qualities, as when music is "played with impressive technical facility and panache." It can also be used to characterize concrete objects designed to make life easier: "Facilities may be limited at these smaller outposts."

But the way in which it's used most often — more and more every day — is as a substitute for other, much more precise words that describe structures, places, equipment, and more. That's flabby and irritating.

And ubiquitous; the files teem with everything from "horse facilities" (stables) to "breeding facilities" (puppy

mills) to a "laundry facility" to a "hemophilia treatment facility" and a "sewer treatment facility"; to "gambling facilities" and "physical fitness facilities" and — honest — "state-of-the-art fermentation facilities." Nor do prisons or jails remain in much of the English-speaking world. You know what *they* are.

The word is maddeningly convenient when we're in a rush. But really, we should try harder. A hospital is a hospital, a factory is a factory, an outhouse is an outhouse.

— Evan Jenkins

A lot more about writing is in *Language Corner* at CJR's Web site, www.cjr.org, under "Journalism Tools."

HARD NUMBERS

68: Number of media personnel murdered or disappeared under Pinochet in Chile, 1973-1986.

134: Number of journalists currently imprisoned worldwide.

49: Number of the 134 who are Internet journalists.

259: Number of stories that mention speaker-elect Nancy Pelosi's status as a grandmother, 9/1/2006 to 12/1/2006.

6: Number of stories that mention ex-speaker Dennis Hastert's status as a grandfather, 6/27/1999 to 12/1/2006.

71: Percentage of page-one stories from Iraq in 67 news outlets that were written by embedded reporters, 3/19/2003 to 5/1/2003.

37, 55, 60, 64, 100: Percentages of all stories from Iraq written by embedded reporters in that same period in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *USA Today*.

6: Number of European countries starting or already operating Arabic news services/channels.

6: Number of those enterprises receiving government funding.

1: Number of U.S. government-run Arabic satellite channels (Al Hurra).

4.1, 80.8: Percentages of citizens of Saudi Arabia, Cairo, Jordan, and Morocco who get most of their news from Al Hurra, Al Jazeera.

Sources: *The New York Times*; Arab Advisors Group; *The Guardian*; Penn State study on influence of embedded reporting on war coverage; Committee to Protect Journalists; CJR research.

DARTS & LAURELS



DART to the Eugene, Oregon, *Register-Guard*, for thumbing its nose at the news. Knocking down still further the ad-edit wall has been a series of ads for gamma knife surgery at Sacred Heart Medical Center. The ad on Sunday, October 29, for example, which appeared on page A3, is dominated by a large photo of a partially closed fist, bandaged index finger poking up by nearly five inches beyond the upper margins of the ad into the news columns above. Thus forced to read around that grossly gratuitous graphic, some readers suspected the paper of giving them the finger.

LAUREL to *The New York Times*, for investigating a trend of biblical proportions. As the *Times* continues to faithfully chronicle the ever-expanding presence of religion in the traditionally secular arenas of our civic life — and the profound challenges that presence presents to sacred First Amendment principles — the paper now brings to the nation's attention the more mundane manifestations of the phenomenon. Citing chapter and verse, the four-part series "In God's Name," by Diana B. Henriques, documents the enormous economic advantages that, with the blessing of the White House, Congress, and the courts, influential religious groups have come to reap in recent years through breaks on taxes, housing, and employment — dispensations that often are unfair and sometimes absurd. Should religious freedom from government interference, for instance, absolve a church-run day-care center from complying with the regulations imposed by the state on its nonreligious counterparts? Should a diocese that dismisses a novice after a diagnosis of breast cancer, or a congregation that fires a rabbi who happened to develop Parkinson's disease, be protected from legal recourse against such discrimination? Should a church that wants to build a sprawling, state-of-the-art fitness center, complete with tanning bed and video arcade, be exempt from land-use laws? Sensitive to the arguments on both sides of the church-state dilemma, and to the delicate balance the establishment clause always requires, the series nonetheless makes a persuasive case for the reestablishment of common sense.

DART to *Forbes*, for neglecting to register at its neighborhood precinct. In a preelection story on the magazine's Web site, "the capitalist tool" explored the proposition that, judging by the his-

tory of previous political campaigns, superrich candidates who fund their own races are making, in the words of the headline, "The Worst Political Investment." Along with citing a number of then current campaigns in which, for all the millions of a hopeful's money, defeat was looming large, the article also drew on comments from several experts who study such stuff — and whose consensus it was that the record of self-funded runs has been, as one of them put it, "pathetic." A conspicuous absentee from the discussion — if you will, the elephant in the room — was the man whose image is presented on one of those expert's Web site as a prime example of poor political investment [of some \$79 million]: Malcolm "Steve" Forbes, a failed self-funded candidate for president in 1996 and 2000, and the magazine's favorite son.

DART to the *Niagara Gazette*, for getting a little too close to the ethical edge. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," wrote Robert Frost, but it seems that that "something" is not the *Gazette*, which as part of the city's redevelopment project recently acquired a handsome structure of stone, concrete, and iron that runs around two sides of its corner parking lot. Designed, built, and paid for by USA Niagara Development and the City of Niagara Falls, the wall, one side of which is situated, with the *Gazette's* permission, inside a foot or so of its property line, enhances the approach to the city's planned entertainment district. It also — as has been noted by the weekly *Niagara Falls Reporter* — enhances the value of the paper's property. Indeed, in the *Reporter's* view, the addition is "essentially a gift to the city's 'newspaper of record' from the very politicians the *Gazette* is supposed to be objectively covering." As for covering the wall itself, nowhere in the *Gazette's* supportive treatment of the project has it been mentioned, objectively or otherwise, at all.

LAUREL to *The Brooklyn Paper*, a weekly broadsheet distributed in the New York City borough, for having an unusual amount of crust. Folded inside the pages of its November 11 issue were glossy four-color inserts promoting Domino's "New Brooklyn Style Pizza," while its front page was delivering a review that sliced the dish to shreds. With so many news outlets catering so shamelessly to advertisers' interests, some Brooklyn readers

expressed gratitude and pride that their own little paper was going against that grain.

Darts & Laurels is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's deputy executive editor, to whom nominations should be addressed: 212-854-1887; gc15@columbia.edu.

ON THE JOB

A TOP 'DIGGER' WORRIES ABOUT HIS OWN POWER
TO DRIVE TRAFFIC — AND THE POTENTIAL REWARDS

DIGG THIS

BY DAVID COHN

As a young journalist, I begin my day by perusing stories written by top reporters at the major newspapers, as well as the offerings of some trusted blogs. At the end of my morning reading, I take about twenty minutes to zero in on three or four pieces that are particularly engaging, and then I submit them to Digg.com, a two-year-old social bookmarking site that lets users vote to determine the best articles of the day. Pulling stories from all over the Web, from popular blogs like *BoingBoing* to front-page features from *The New York Times*, Digg is a democratic filter where the readers are the gatekeepers — and some one million visitors come each day to see what the “Digg army” has dug up.

To this community I am known as Digidave. Every time one of my submissions is voted onto the front page, my rank among Digg's 600,000 contributors is enhanced. As of this writing I am ranked forty-third and have become a trusted contributor, watched by more than two hundred people who are notified whenever I submit a new story, which, in turn, gives my submissions a better chance at reaching Digg's front page.

With up to ten thousand submissions a day, Digg is a rich marketplace of story ideas for journalists looking for trends. I first stumbled upon Digg in November 2005 when it was geared toward technology stories, and found the inspiration for at least three ideas that eventually became published articles. Then, in late February 2006, when a colleague's story hit the front page, I realized that Digg wasn't just a source of story ideas but also could be a way to promote my own work to a larger audience. I sent in a story I wrote for *Seedmagazine.com*. It hit Digg's front page and became what at the time was the second-most-viewed article in the young site's history. I was hooked.

Most of my submissions are from major news outlets or blogs, but I also submit my own articles. That

garners more readers for my stories and gets me pats on the back from my editors, who know that through my Digger status, I am sending their sites huge waves of traffic.

In the beginning, I was afraid of being called out as a self-promoter, someone who manipulates a tool that is meant to give people without access to the mainstream media a say in the country's news agenda. “There is a dark cloud around self-submission but the thing is, it makes perfect sense,” says Jay Adelson, Digg's c.e.o. “If you are the author of an article, why not submit it yourself?”

Still, I began to wonder if being a social bookmarker and a professional journalist were in conflict with each other.

The front page of Digg is an amalgamation of preferences. Digg doesn't produce original content, but it does have something of a symbiotic relationship with major news organizations. Without the content from news outlets, there is no Digg. In turn, as Digg began to expand in June 2006 — adding topics like politics, sports, and entertainment — it became clear that being a top Digger gave one the power to drive a significant amount of Web traffic back to those news outlets. On any given day a front-page story on Digg can send an extra ten thousand to fifteen thousand visitors to a site (one editor told me a photo gallery posted on Digg generated 75,000 extra page views). This helps sell advertising. While Digg keeps contributors' identities anonymous, an August 14 *Business Week* article estimated that 94 percent of Digg's users are “male; more than half are IT types in their 20s and 30s making \$75,000 or more. It's a demographic advertisers lust after.”

“I've probably shifted millions of dollars in bandwidth over the last six months,” said Mark Johnson, twenty-six, who goes by the name Aidenag and is ranked eleventh on Digg.

This power, even if one allows for a bit of inflation, has created a problem. Aidenag, like most of

the top thirty Diggers, is not hard to get in touch with, since like many Diggers he chooses to display his contact information. Diggers are a networking bunch, a result of the social nature of the site.

The top one hundred contributors — determined by their success in placing their submissions on the front page — are responsible for more than half the content that fills the front page each day. This group has been playing the part of a collective editor, and offers have poured in to pay popular Digg contributors for their “services.”

Many of these offers have been made out in the open, like Netscape’s offer to pay some of the top Diggers \$1,000 a month to become permanent fixtures on Netscape’s Digg-like home page. Today, almost half of Netscape’s sixteen “Navigators” — paid social bookmakers — were originally top contributors to Digg. But other offers have been made in secret, according to Johnson, and he isn’t the only one being given the chance to Digg for cash. “One site offered me \$100 for every submission that I got onto the front page of Digg,” says Derek Van Vliet, or BloodJunkie, who is ranked sixth on Digg and who was among those Diggers who took Netscape’s offer.

To accept such an offer is a violation of Digg’s terms of service, but Adelson acknowledges that it’s impossible to keep tabs on all 600,000 registered Digg contributors, and that in large part the community must police itself. While professional editors and reporters have also been caught taking bribes, they at least risk destroying their careers if caught. The top contributors to Digg, some as young as sixteen, only risk losing a digital account.

In early November, Digg — which has been the subject of sales talks — changed the algorithm that determines which submissions make the front page. The idea, in part, is to address the unequal access to the front page, and it has gotten a bit harder of late to get my submissions on page one. But the algorithm has been changed before, and the problem didn’t go away. For many, Digg is a game and a change in algorithm is merely an obstacle to be surmounted. Entire communities, like Spikethevote.com, have sprung up to try to cheat the algorithm by inflating a story’s votes.

Regardless of how well these attempts at cheating Digg work, the self-policing reality is troubling, especially in light of Digg’s policy of keeping the identity of users private. It fosters a sense of freedom in what people are willing to submit, but it also creates a void of accountability. While I can stand firm that trading Diggs for money is wrong, I have to admit it comes eerily close to what I do when I submit stories that I have been paid to write. ■

David Cohn is a student at Columbia’s Graduate School of Journalism.



THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA — MISSOULA DEAN, SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

The University of Montana, Missoula, invites nominations and applications for the position of Dean of the School of Journalism. Dedicated to the education of professional journalists, the award-winning and freshly reaccredited school is the nation’s second oldest undergraduate school of journalism. Its 12 tenure-track faculty members and several adjunct professors prepare roughly 500 students for bachelor’s and master’s degrees with options in print journalism, broadcast journalism, broadcast production and photojournalism. Our students continue to earn national distinction through groundbreaking efforts that include the Native News Honors Project, the Student Documentary Unit, Footbridge Forum, the Montana Journalism Review and RezNet, the nation’s premiere online news source for Indian Country. Other outlets for student work include Montana PBS; Montana Public Radio; KBGA, the campus radio station; and the Montana Kaimin, an independent student newspaper. Faculty and students work closely with Montana’s news media through internships and such vehicles as the Community News Service and Legislative News Service, which provide student-produced news for dozens of Montana weekly newspapers and radio stations, and through its pioneering Rural News Network, which serves communities without traditional news outlets.

Set amid western Montana’s spectacular scenery and nurtured by Missoula’s vibrant cultural life, the school cherishes its reputation and status as an integral part of the state’s flagship liberal arts and sciences university. UM’s 2,500 faculty and staff serve nearly 14,000 students in the traditional disciplines and in professions ranging from business and pharmacy to fine arts, forestry, education, and law. The Journalism School will move into a new, state-of-the-art building in the summer of 2007.

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ON THE JOB

A YOUNG REPORTER WINCES WHEN HIS BIG STORY
LANDS ON THE *DR. PHIL* SHOW

THE TALES WE TELL

BY PETER HOLLEY

I first began to notice the wisp of a girl with long black hair as I drove home from work in the evenings. She was usually standing on a corner beside a gas station in downtown Annapolis, her sliver of a face pockmarked, her dark eyes locked onto each passing vehicle. Her ragged clothes and weary demeanor were conspicuous along this busy downtown corridor, where leafy blocks of historic homes meet antique shops and cobblestone streets.

It took a few weeks for my curiosity to boil over, but I eventually pulled my car to the side of the road, approached her, and struck up a conversation. My press pass, I figured, was license enough to talk to whomever I pleased. Sarah, I learned, was a prostitute. I was a reporter at *The Capital*. A lot of people wanted something from this troubled twenty-four-year-old. I wanted a story.

What she told me that day, and over the weeks that followed, turned out not only to be a great story, but a minor media phenomenon, one that has taken Sarah all the way from her precarious existence on the streets of Annapolis to Dr. Phil's coveted couch in Los Angeles. And yet it's a story that has also left me with questions about the nature of the narrative I began to construct that day last April. With Sarah's recent appearances on national television, these questions have only intensified.

Sarah's story is what you might call a parent's worst nightmare: cute, all-American kid dabbles in drugs and careens into a downward spiral. Until she began experimenting with heroin around age seventeen,



Sarah leans against a tombstone as she smokes crack in a cemetery in Annapolis, Maryland.

Sarah insists that she had a fairly typical childhood in a quiet middle-class neighborhood outside Columbia, South Carolina, with her mother, Cindy, and her twin sister, Tecoa. She considered herself a budding artist who loved to draw and was rarely seen without a camera around her neck. The household was strictly vegetarian and junkfood was forbidden; Sarah didn't even taste a Coke until she was ten.

When I met Sarah, more than six years after she began using heroin, her life was a shambles. Her drug

habit, which now included crack cocaine, had forced her to drop out of community college several years before. She had dipped in and out of prostitution and rehab centers ever since.

Annapolis is a quaint state capital better known for its annual yacht races and sumptuous crab cakes than its prostitutes. I knew that Sarah's salacious tales of sex with local lawyers, construction workers, and soccer dads in minivans would shake things up. My sense of this deepened when she invited me into her innermost sanctum, a tiny trash-strewn clearing behind some bushes in the local cemetery where she spent much of her time. I sat on a tree stump and watched her smoke crack. "I know I'm killing myself," she told me as her body stiffened and her bloodshot eyes rolled into her head. "But I just can't stop."

It turned out to be the first of several such encounters with Sarah, each one as disturbing as it was compelling. It was also my first serious encounter with the dueling loyalties that hover over journalists — to the story or to my humanity. "This," I'd say to myself after one of Sarah's raw testimonials, "is great fucking stuff! I can't wait until my editor reads this."

JOSHUA MCKERROW

Several weeks after I met Sarah, my story was published on the front page of *The Capital*. It chronicled her life over the course of several days. Our attempts to conceal Sarah's identity failed when a series of photos we ran of her, though taken from behind, allowed people to recognize her on the street. It was something we'd gone to great lengths to avoid, and for me and the photographer I worked with, it was a painfully embarrassing mistake that still makes me uncomfortable more than six months later. In a matter of days, Sarah went from an anonymous street urchin to something of a local celebrity. People were seduced by her candor, her street savvy, and by the story of a middle-class white girl — not unlike their own children — whose life had unraveled so tragically.

The *Dr. Phil* show came calling in July after receiving video footage and a copy of my article from a former guest of the show who was living in Annapolis. Sarah and her sister Tecoa, herself a recovering drug addict and former prostitute, were flown to L.A. and placed in "The Dr. Phil House," a picturesque halfway house-turned-Big Brother compound where hidden cameras would document the young women's attempt to rehab while the good doctor used his distinct brand of bullying southern charm — imagine a football coach doing psychology — to get to the root of their self-destructive behavior. Another group of opportunists, it seemed, had latched onto Sarah's story.

The three-part series that Dr. Phil's producers dubbed "Heroin Twins" began November 20. I tuned in to episode two, a week later, and there was Sarah, looking particularly deranged as she roamed the streets of Annapolis smoking crack and hooking, all of it in slow motion while foreboding music played in the background. And there was Dr. Phil, appearing suddenly on a plasma screen to berate the girls with boot-camp rhetoric: "You've entered my world now," he tells the sisters. And

later: "Come tomorrow morning, I'm coming for you."

The Fall and the Redemption — through self-discipline, of course, and in public, no less. I cringed as I watched; it was my story taken to the extreme. The narrative that Dr. Phil was exploiting was the narrative that I helped to establish. Sarah's story always required simplicity to be compelling. If Sarah were black, had grown up in an inner-city neighborhood, and didn't have albums of angelic childhood photos, would she be on *Dr. Phil*? Would I have even stopped my car that day? It occurred to me that I had no idea what led Sarah down her troubled path; certainly it was more than casual experimentation. As an inexperienced reporter in search of a great story, I had relied on a trite, one-dimensional narrative of tragedy and redemption, the kind of thing we've all seen countless times on television and in the movies. I had failed to try to understand Sarah more fully or give dimension to the long, often contradictory battle she'd waged with addiction.

I can still recall a warm afternoon several days after I first met Sarah, when I followed her as she was en route to her favorite spot. She had just been paid \$20 by a customer and, after a five-minute detour through the local open-air drug market, she had \$10 worth of crack, a small rock about the size of a pencil eraser, which she had wrapped into a plastic bag and stuffed down her pants. She passed through the gates of the old cemetery, following a narrow trail over rolling hills, past blossoming trees and chirping birds, through a dense maze of impassive stones. She slowed to an easy stroll and a rare look of calm came over her sunburned face. Moments later, as she sat atop an old stone crypt, she pulled out her crack pipe and began smoking. "This isn't me," she kept saying that afternoon. "I'm a lot smarter than this. I'm just stuck, and I really need help." ■

Peter Holley is a student at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism.

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FIRST PERSON

THEY FUELED HER CHILDHOOD DREAMS;
NOW THEY ARE VANISHING
ODE TO THE AUTHOR'S QUERY

BY PENELOPE ROWLANDS

It was tiny, the slightest piece of prose ever published under my name. If you were nearsighted or preoccupied, you might easily have missed it. It probably went unnoticed by many readers of *The New York Times Book Review* when it appeared, at the foot of page twelve, on March 14, 2004, under the heading "Author's Query." What followed was a variation on a standard theme:

Author's Query

For a biography of the legendary fashion editor Carmel Snow (1886-1961), editor in chief of Harper's Bazaar from 1934 to 1957, I would appreciate hearing from anyone who might have relevant personal recollections, memos or other correspondence, photographs or other material.

PENELOPE ROWLANDS
22 Hamilton Avenue
Princeton, N.J. 08542
penelope8@aol.com

It was the very last time that one of these long-familiar author's queries — diminutive written requests by writers seeking help with their research — appeared in the *Book Review*. According to a *Times* spokeswoman, they were dropped because of space constraints.

Such requests first ran in the *Times's* book review section in about 1949. Their authors, over the years, ranged from the celebrated — the biographer Richard Ellman; Ralph Ginzburg, the controversial

publisher — to the now deeply obscure, such as Dorothy Laughlin McGuinn and the wonderfully named Ernest Earnest.

As a book-addicted teenager growing up in New York, I thrilled to those items, which provided a clue to the mysterious process by which books actually got written. Their very matter-of-factness seemed delicious to me. That one could secure a book contract and soberly announce it to the world! And now and then, to my delight, I'd spy a favorite writer's name — Janet Malcolm, for one — sometimes, amazingly, with an address attached. I felt privileged to be able to learn what an author I admired was working on, long before the book itself appeared in stores.

The queries turned up frequently back then. There might be several, even as many as five, in a given week — more in summer than in other seasons. (I pondered this, too. Was it because academics, having summers off, tended to begin their book projects then?) The formula behind them rarely changed. Even so, in this tight format, personalities burst through, as in the case of a writer named Pearl Sieben, engaged in researching Al Jolson, who sounded almost pleading (and can't any biographer relate?). "Any material sent to me I would promptly return," she swore. In 1956, Wallace Stegner, requesting correspondence by Bernard De Voto, oozily promised to handle it "with gratitude and alacrity."

I sent my own query in, rather late in the process of writing the biography it described, blindly, and with little expectation of seeing it published; I'd noticed fewer and fewer author's queries in the *Times*. Even so, I dropped a letter in the mail and was pleasantly surprised to learn a few weeks later, via

a call from an assistant editor, that my item would run in several weeks.

Although I've worked as a journalist for more than twenty years, and have written several illustrated books, *A Dash of Daring: Carmel Snow and Her Life in Fashion, Art, and Letters*, as my biography came to be called, was my first full-length project. I found its subject endlessly fascinating. At *Harper's Bazaar*, Carmel Snow's mandate was to create a magazine for "the well-dressed woman with a well-dressed mind." And she did, bringing the newest in not just fashion, but photography, art, fiction, and more to her magazine. She was an extraordinary person, larger than life, funny, domineering, imperious, generous, infuriating. People who encountered her rarely forgot her. She filled the room.

Which I think explains what happened after my author's query ran. Although a fellow biographer had warned me that the response was likely to be underwhelming, that wasn't the case. It began with a trickle, then widened to a stream. There were letters, e-mails, and telephone calls, even though my number wasn't included in my query.

I began to feel that *A Dash of Daring* might not — every writer's worst fear! — sink without a trace. Its subject had, quite simply, meant too much to too many. I heard from a wide range of people, among them the composer Ned Rorem and a noted biographer, Nicholas Fox Weber. I had a letter from a man who'd grown up down the road from Snow and one from a woman whose long-ago lover had had, infuriatingly enough, an ongoing crush on the editor. One man hinted darkly that she might have been a target for J. Edgar Hoover's FBI; still another correspondent, a housekeeper, led me to her boss, a key editor at Snow's *Harper's Bazaar*.

Those disparate voices enriched my book, published in November 2005. Even those who approached me, professing to have little to report, came through with something valuable. One woman, who had been a young secretary at another Hearst publication in the protracted, agonizing period when Carmel Snow, then in her seventies, simply refused to leave her post at *Bazaar*, recalled how this diminished (and by then frequently tipsy) former legend had still caused rooms to fall silent as she passed through. What this correspondent gave me was just a glimpse, a mental snapshot, but it rounded out the story of my subject's last years.

The response to my query wasn't just about work: several old friends of mine also surfaced, longtime fans of author's queries who were delighted to find one containing a familiar name.

Like any biographer, I worked against time, and

not just the looming publication date. A disconcerting number of the people I interviewed, Richard Avedon and Henri Cartier-Bresson among them, died not long after we spoke. I raced to interview as many people who had worked with Carmel Snow as I could; I wanted to hear their voices, cull their stories, before they, too, slipped away.

For more than half a century, in innumerable author's queries, legions of writers have tried, as I did, to bring back the dead, to reconstruct their lives. Many of their projects have been forgotten by now, their subjects seemingly erased. Whatever happened to "Madeleine Smith, who was tried in Scotland for the murder of her lover in 1857," the

**For more than a half century,
in innumerable author's queries,
legions of writers have tried to
bring back the dead.**

subject of one request? And what of the American writer Benjamin de Casseres, whom Upton Sinclair was researching back in 1957? Was he once a household name?

I knew all those years ago, curled up on a sofa on the Upper East Side in my school uniform, simultaneously full of both ambition and ennui, that I wanted to be an author. What I couldn't have guessed was how much things around me would change by the time I became one. How relentlessly the world, reinventing itself, moves on.

Biographers will now take their queries elsewhere, and they'll probably have to pay for the privilege — a delightful, anachronistic aspect of the *Times's* notices was that they were printed free. *The New York Review of Books*, the *London Review of Books*, the *Times Literary Supplement* still print such queries in their classified sections. (Jumbled among other ads, these requests never have the stature that those in the *Times Book Review* had, where they stood alone, islands in an editorial sea. And the fact that the *Book Review* is contained in a newspaper seems to guarantee a broader audience.) No doubt the Internet, as it does so often, will help to fill the void. But it seems safe to say that literary projects will never again be launched with such understated elegance as they were in the *Times's* pages for so long, when scores of writers, year after year, appealed for help — soberly, even majestically, and in just a few narrow lines. ■

Penelope Rowlands is a freelance writer who lives in Princeton, New Jersey.

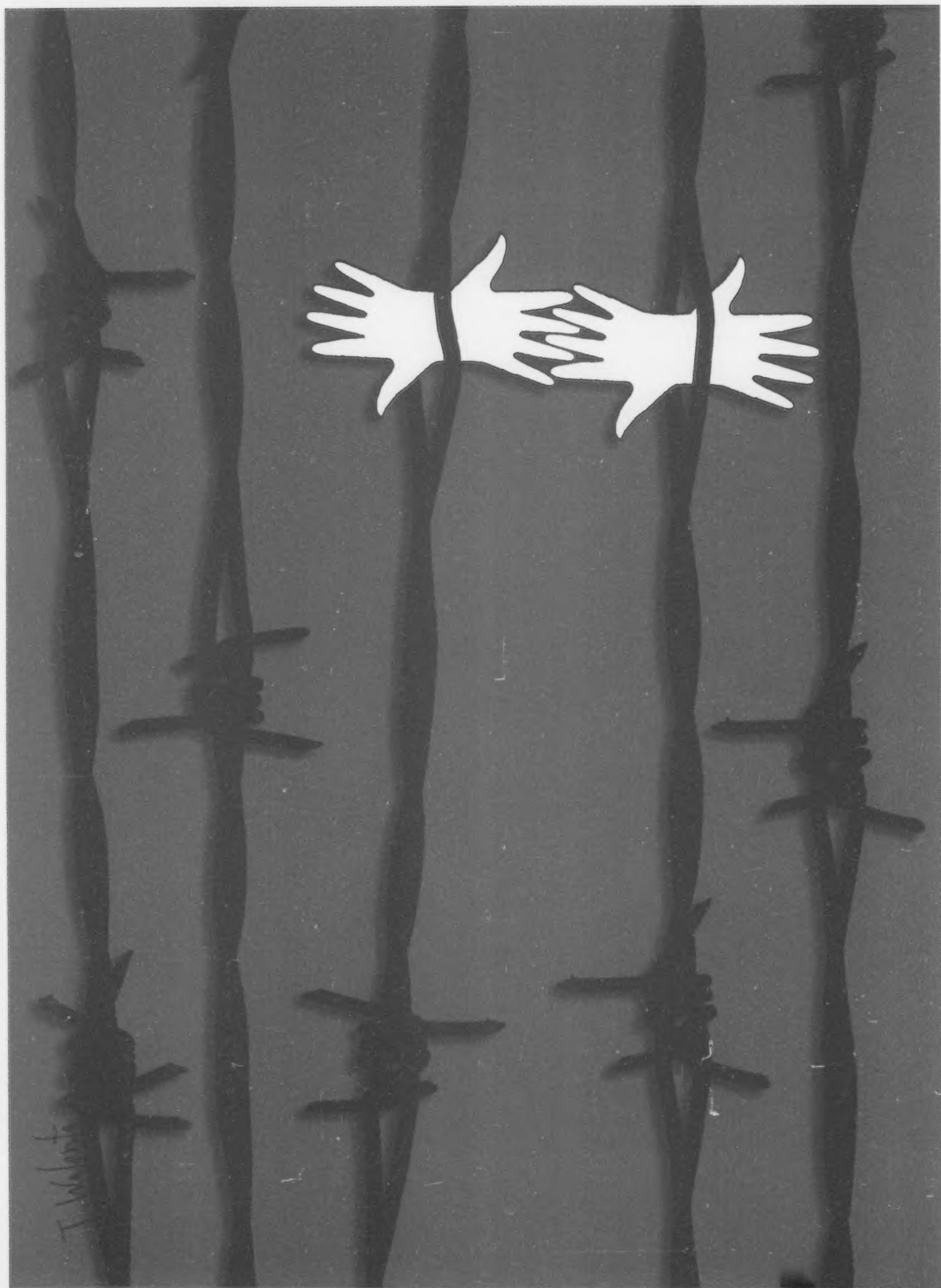




THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM

THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER
Charlotte, North Carolina

PHOTO BY SEAN HEMMERLE



Young bloggers in the Middle East are breaking taboos, reaching out to the 'other,' and possibly sowing the seeds of reform

THE NEW ARAB CONVERSATION

BY GAL BECKERMAN

Bombs don't discriminate between combatants and children. This sad fact became an inconvenient one last summer for Israel, which had maintained that its bombing of Lebanon was solely an attack on Hezbollah, the Shiite militia that had kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and menaced the Jewish state's northern border. To an anxious Lebanese population who'd seen most of their country's south reduced to a parking lot, Israel's persistent message — We are doing this for your own good — rang increasingly hollow.

By the beginning of August, the French and American ambassadors to the United Nations had

finally hammered out a cease-fire resolution. But as the Security Council prepared to vote, the Lebanese government and the Arab League declared that the agreement was too favorable to Israel. A tense and edgy delegation arrived in New York on August 8 to plead the Arab case.

Dan Gillerman, the Israeli ambassador to the UN, didn't have to do much at those deliberations — simply listen to the complaints, appear to be the least obstructionist in the room, and restate his country's position, as absurd as it may have sounded by that point, that Israel's bombs were in fact helping the Lebanese people to free themselves from the "cancer" of Hezbollah that had metasta-

TOMASZ WALENIA

sized in their midst. In this last task, he had an unusual ally: "I believe that one courageous Lebanese youngster was speaking for many when he wrote in his Internet blog, and I quote, 'It is not only Israeli soldiers that the Hezbollah has taken hostage. It is us, the people of Lebanon.'"

This "Lebanese youngster" was, of course, a blogger, and maybe the first to have his words bounce off the solemn walls of the United Nations. And though he probably would not have appreciated being deployed as a weapon in Israel's public-relations war, the presence of his independent voice, a counterintuitive opinion not filtered through any official source, said a lot about the power of Middle

Bloggers are writing about their lives, but these lives are taking place in environments in which politics and history cannot be perceived as mere elements on the margins.

Eastern Web logs to expose a hidden trove of multiple perspectives in a world that the West often imagines as having only one perspective — that of the "Arab Street," a place of conformity, of mass acquiescence to singular passions, be they blind support for a dictator or seething hatred of Israel.

Last summer was, in fact, a watershed moment for the Middle Eastern blogosphere. The conflict between Israel and Hezbollah not only brought attention to the many different Arab conversations that had taken place on homemade Web sites in the past two or three years, but also launched thousands more of them. And they were more than just a handful of aberrant voices. They reflected a new culture of openness, dialogue, and questioning. And unlike the neoconservative notion that these ideals can be dropped on a foreign population like so many bomblets, the push for change here is coming from within. Whether it is a Jordanian student discussing the taboo subject of the monarchy's viability or a Saudi woman writing about her sexual experiences or an Egyptian commenting with sadness at an Israeli blogger's description of a suicide bombing, each of these unprecedented acts is one small move toward opening up these societies.

The Arab blogosphere has been growing for a few years now, though not at a particularly quick pace. Only 10 percent of the Arab world has Internet access, yet that is a five-fold increase from 2000. Of course, not all Arab blogs are about liberalizing Arab society. Some use the technology as another front in the jihad against the West being

waged by groups like Al Qaeda. One, Irhabi 007, who was recently profiled in *The Atlantic Monthly*, created Web sites to disseminate videos of beheadings and insurgent attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq. Most analysts and bloggers put the number of Arab bloggers at fewer than 25,000. Of those, a majority blog in Arabic. And though there are surely interesting discussions happening on those sites, Arab bloggers themselves say that a particularly interesting alternative space is being formed on the sites composed in English. Now aggregated on blogging portals like iToot.net and enhanced by the YouTube-like Web site Ikbis, it is in this community of people who are self-consciously half-turned toward the West that one can feel the breathing becoming easier.

Those bloggers are people like Roba Al-Assi, a twenty-one-year-old design student in Amman, Jordan, who recently wrote about her opposition to the death penalty for Saddam Hussein:

It is the premeditated and cold-blooded killing of a human being by the state in the name of justice (I know he killed thousands, but it is in my moral fabric to be better than others. Throw him in jail for the rest of his life, that's a lot worse than death).

Or the Egyptian blogger who calls himself Big Pharaoh, a twenty-seven-year-old graduate of the American University in Cairo, who expressed his support for the Egyptian culture minister who was criticized for stating that he thought the hijab, the traditional woman's head covering worn by some Muslim women, was "regressive":

There are numerous things that make me proud of this country. How the country descended into such stupidity, ignorance, and darkness is definitely not among them. I feel like vomiting every time I think about how this man was virulently attacked for merely stating his opinion on a thing as stupid as the hair cover.

Or Laila El-Haddad, who, on her blog, "Unplugged: Diary of a Palestinian Mother," describes herself as a "journalist, mom, occupied Palestinian — all packed into one," and posted this account of crossing at Rafah from Egypt back into Gaza, after waiting in limbo for weeks for the border to open:

Some wailed in exhaustion, others fainted; still others cracked dry humor, trying to pass the time. We stood, thousands of us, packed together elbow to elbow like cattle, penned in between steel barriers on one end, and riot-gear-ed Egyptian security guards on the perimeter, who were given orders not to allow anyone through until they hear otherwise from the Israelis — and to respond with force if anyone dared.

In the American blogosphere, opinions and life tales blossom a millionfold every day. But against the background of a largely party-line mainstream local Arab media, and the absence of avenues for national conversation, these Arab bloggers, most of

whom are anonymous for their own safety, commit small acts of bravery simply by speaking their minds. It should be said that most of the people maintaining blogs do come out of the highest strata of society, economically and educationally, so their opinions can seem at times to represent no wider a circle than the upper crust of any given country. But, as Ammar Abdulhamid, a Syrian blogger who was forced into exile in September 2005 for his democracy activism, which included blogging about his eight-month interrogation by Syrian security services, put it: "There is nothing wrong with admitting that we represent a certain elite. It's not exclusively an economic elite, though economics surely plays a large factor. These are people who are comfortable, who have more time to blog. But in itself this is not the problem. The importance of this technology at this stage is to connect the elites better, to network the elites, to make them able to share more ideas and organize." The power of the medium, Abdulhamid says, will come when those bloggers find a way to "cross the bridge between the elite and the grass roots" — a process that is already beginning, through a few organized demonstrations coordinated by bloggers, online campaigns, and the posting of information about police brutality or sexual harassment.

Blogs can serve two functions: they are diaries, where the minutiae of a life are spelled out in 500-word posts, and they are a personal op-ed page, in which a writer comments at will about news articles and daily political developments, rambles in anger or appreciation, or promotes ideas. All of this happens every day on American blogs. But the context in the Arab blogosphere is different. For one thing, it is so much smaller. In the U.S., political blogs tend to split off into separate spheres of left and right that rarely touch — call them Huffingtonville and Hewittland — each with its predictable response to any political event. But the small size of the Arab blogosphere forces people with contrary opinions, or even more mildly divergent viewpoints, to engage each other. As one Arab blogger said, "We're not big enough to preach to the choir yet. There is no choir."

But the more compelling reason for the singularity of the Arab blogosphere is that the Middle East is a region where the historical and the personal slam up against each other daily in a way they do only once a decade or so in America. This gives even mundane musings elevated significance. Bloggers are writing about their lives. But those lives are taking place in environments in which politics and history cannot be perceived as mere elements on the margins. For the twentysomething growing up in Riyadh, writing resentfully about the power of the religious authorities, the questions are fundamental ones about the state of her society. For the Egyptian blogger, the brutal suppression of a

demonstration can make the difference in whether he chooses to stay in the country or leave. This urgency makes the commentary more complex and interesting than the us-versus-them combat of so many American blogs. "We see it's the whole country at stake," said a well-known Lebanese blogger who goes by the nom de blog Abu Kais. "For us, watching politics is not like watching a football game. It's existential."

Salam Pax is widely acknowledged as the Adam of Middle East bloggers. The blogging revolution that first began to spread through America in the late 1990s (the first "online diary," as a blog was then known, was created by a Swarthmore student in January 1994) reached the Middle East three or four years ago, and it was only with Pax's quirky and insightful dispatches in 2003 from a prewar and then postwar Iraq that Americans were made aware that the phenomenon had arrived there, too.

His blog, "Where is Raed?" had all the hallmarks of those that would follow in its wake. A twenty-nine-year-old recently graduated architecture student who had spent time in the West, Pax wrote in fluent English, observing the chaos that was quickly accumulating around him. At first, he was writing for himself, using the blog as a diary, but then he became aware of the scarcity of Arab bloggers writing in English about anything other than religious matters. As he told *The Guardian* in 2003, "I was saying, 'Come on, look, the Arabs here: sex, alcohol, belly dancers, TV shows, where are they?' All you saw was people talking about God and Allah. There was nothing about what was happening here." Then the war began, and that impulse to expose the parts of his world that the West was not seeing took on an even greater urgency. By the time of the invasion, 20,000 people were reading Pax regularly. His posts captured an emotional, lived experience of the war, one that evaded most journalists covering the conflict.

A few dozen others then followed Pax, also writing in English, and eloquently capturing the Iraqi experience of the war. Here, for example, is the blogger Mohammed from "Iraq the Model," writing after a particularly brutal flare-up of sectarian violence in November 2006:

Being stuck at home for four days with all the violence going outside and the fear that it might reach you at home was a horrible experience. When the news came that the curfew was over and people began walking on the streets again there was a strange feeling that was particularly very strong this morning in Baghdad; despite all the rumors and fear from more wide-scale revenge attacks there was a feeling among the people that they must go out on the streets and live in all possible means.

The last two years have seen many more voices

emerge from other Arab countries. Jordanian blogs began to appear in the wake of the Iraqi ones. According to the organizers of Jordan Planet, the largest server and aggregator of that country's bloggers, what was only a handful of blogs last year is now a few hundred. The same is true of Lebanon. There, the blogs came in waves, with the first arriving in early 2005 during the Cedar Revolution, when the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was followed by mass protests that ended Syria's military presence. The second wave came this summer, during the war

'You want to tell me that these people are stupid? Well, they're not. You want to tell me they hate me because I'm Jewish? Well, that's wrong, too. And they prove that to me every day.'

— *Lirun Rabinowitz, Israeli blogger*

with Israel. Egypt, and other, more conservative countries in the Arab world, have far fewer but equally vocal bloggers. Yet even in those nations the numbers have increased in the past year. In Saudi Arabia the number of blogs tripled last year to an estimated 2,000, according to a recent *Washington Post* article.

To hear the bloggers themselves describe it, blogging has taken off in the Arab world because it presents an opportunity to reclaim individuality. In a region where leaders, be they Hassan Nasrallah or Ismail Haniya, claim to speak on behalf of all Arabs, a blog is a chance to contradict, to undermine, and to assert. "Every leader thinks they represent everyone in these countries," says Abu Kais. "And I think that's something we challenge every day in our blogs. We challenge what they say, and we always show the politicians as hypocrites, really. We have documented what has happened over the past two years and are able to contrast statements that show the level of the hypocrisy. That's something you don't always find in Lebanese media."

The dynamism of the blog posts, as well as the string of comments that usually follow each of them, can best be appreciated when viewed against a backdrop of the mainstream Arab media. With the exception of a few papers in Lebanon (notably, the English-language *Daily Star*) and a handful of publications in Egypt and Jordan, most local media in the Arab world are still either directly state-controlled or subject to such intimidation by the gov-

ernment that journalists and editors rarely challenge authority. Each country's media have their red lines that cannot be crossed. In Jordan, it is the monarchy. In Egypt, it's the Mubarak regime. Any criticism of fundamentalist Islam's growing role in Arab society is off limits to everyone. And in much of the Arab local media Israel is portrayed as the ultimate evil. Israel, in fact, can be a tool of state control in Arab media. A high level of anti-Israel rhetoric serves the purpose of directing anger and scrutiny away from the regimes in power.

That was mitigated somewhat by the advent in recent years of satellite channels like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, which offer at least the potential of a more independent analysis and criticism of Arab governments. But by some accounts, both channels, though Al-Jazeera more so, have taken on a tone and a content that plays, as one Syrian blogger put it, "to the largest common denominator, drawing on the same language of victimhood, the tired Arab nationalist line. It is Fox news. Many people compare it to CNN. I think it has to be compared to Fox." (The Israeli media, for their part, though certainly free and open to criticizing the government and not averse by any means to plastering the country's problems on the front page, also resort most often to simple narratives and well-known generalizations when it comes to depicting the Arab enemy, not giving serious attention to the aspiration of the Palestinians, for example).

The bloggers have stood out against this background. Some of them have even used the Web for political action. Bloggers led an Arab movement to support products from Denmark in the aftermath of the Danish cartoon riots and the Arab boycott that followed. They have also organized demonstrations and, much like American bloggers, used their Web sites as forums to expose injustices. Egyptian bloggers recently circulated video of men wilding in the streets of Cairo, sexually assaulting women at random, eventually bringing the incident to the world's attention. Jordanian bloggers, angry that the government regulators had decided to block access to Skype, a phone service that allows users to communicate freely over the Internet, started a campaign that led to the decision's reversal. And then there was the war, in which bloggers organized donations for the displaced of Lebanon.

Still, there are good reasons why most of the Arab blogosphere remains anonymous. Just this past year, several bloggers were jailed in Egypt, including Abdel Karim Sulaiman Amer, who was arrested in November and charged with "spreading information disruptive of public order," "incitement to hate Muslims," and "defaming the President of the Republic." Earlier last year, another Egyptian blogger, Alaa Ahmed Seif al-Islam, was arrested and given three consecutive fifteen-day detentions in prison, largely for his blogging

activity. Other countries, like Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, don't arrest bloggers, but they aggressively block blogs they find subversive.

The Committee to Protect Bloggers, a now defunct U.S. organization that monitored bloggers who found themselves in danger, kept track of the various forms of intimidation and suppression. Curt Hopkins, who was the group's director, says there are three basic methods that countries employ to suppress bloggers: technical filtering, the law, and direct intimidation. Though it is fairly easy to track down bloggers using IP addresses, bloggers have an easier time evading the authorities than do journalists working for a newspaper. "When it comes to shutting down a publication, it's pretty easy," says Hopkins. "You just send some goons with baseball bats and suddenly you don't have a publication. It's that simple. Also it's easier to find people because they are in the offices when you come to arrest them. And though it's true that if you have enough money and time, you can find almost anyone, you've got to remember that most governments don't have enough money and enough time." Abdulhamid, the Syrian blogger who continued to update his blog every day, even while the state police were interrogating him, also noticed such limitations. "During my interrogation, I saw that, one, most security apparatus really don't have access to the Internet; two, they don't know how to use that technology very well to begin with, even if they did have access." Still, enough bloggers have either been arrested or, as in Abdulhamid's case, had their lives threatened, for the fear to be well founded.

Last summer's war between Israel and Hezbollah was a defining moment for the Arab blogosphere, when all the elements of the online world that had been building for the previous two or three years suddenly were put to the test in what became widely known as "the most-blogged war." In such a crisis, when entrenchment and nationalistic devotion tend to trump openness and self-criticism, the Arab blogs could easily have lost their unique flavor. But they didn't. And the blogosphere only strengthened one of its more interesting liberalizing functions: acting as a frequency of communication between Arabs and Israelis.

For the first time, the phenomenon gained some attention in the West. How could it not? There was something revolutionary in the notion of an Israeli woman huddling in a bomb shelter in Haifa instant-messaging a Lebanese man whose family was planning its escape to Damascus, even while Katyusha rockets and bombers flew overhead. "While two countries were at war, people were live-blogging it and talking about it in real time with each other," says Michael J. Totten, a prominent American blog-

ger who has edited a book of blog posts from the war and traveled widely in the Middle East. "There has never been anything like that in the American blogosphere, nor in any two countries that I'm aware of in the world ever." Totten had lived in Beirut and knew what it meant for the two sides to be talking in this way. "It was encouraging for me to see this," he said. "Because on the Lebanese side the standard line is that Israel is the enemy, full stop. And it is actually illegal for any Lebanese citizens to have any contact whatsoever with an Israeli citizen. It is treason. But most of the people in the Lebanese blogosphere were having none of it."

The blogs did what they do best. First, you had full descriptions from individuals of their experience under the bombardment, both physical and psychological: an Israeli blogger named Gavriel, for one, tried to give a face to the Israeli army then moving north into Lebanon. "We know these soldiers," he wrote. "They're all of our kids — for some of us literally so. We've known them since they were little. They've grown up in front of us, we've watched how they were raised. We've watched them shoot hoops, and play games in the street. We've bought cotton candy from their neighborhood stands . . . They're not killers but defenders, the best we've got." Or there was Lebanese Lady, writing, "What I feel now, as a citizen, and what everyone feels is disappointment, anger, anxiety, frustration. We're scared and locked up at home. War came in a day. War in one day. All the books I've read about war, the daily news on Afghanistan and Iraq, how we were saying 'how terrible the situation was in Gaza' — and now I'm living it."

In addition to this outpouring of real-time testimony, you could read actual discussions, and often heated arguments, taking place in the comments sections of certain blogs, in which Lebanese and Israelis engaged each other at the deepest levels about the politics of the conflict, their fears, and sometime even their hopes for the days after. Those provided an important outlet for many people, even when the rhetoric was belligerent. *At least we're talking*, bloggers frequently pointed out. One site, lebanesebloggers.blogspot.com, created in February 2005, became one of the main destinations for such conversations, and during the month-long duration of the fighting, received a quarter of a million page views.

Lisa Goldman, an Israeli blogger who grew up in Canada, has far-reaching contacts in the Arab blogosphere and has been, for many Arab bloggers, their first link with an Israeli. She worried that in the darker moments those lines of communication would be cut. And to some degree, she admits, they were. Friendships were ruptured. But for the most part, the connections stayed intact. "I pictured a very small core of people huddling togeth-

er surrounded by this massive, massive sea of hate — everyone just yelling at each other and pulling out the same old narratives and arguments and refusing to see past them,” she said. “The only solace, I think, was that at the end of the day, if you really look at what happened, even with war flaring around us, it was impossible for the bloggers from both sides who were talking to really wage a battle against someone you had a genuine relationship with.”

The blogger known as Egyptian Sandmonkey, the twenty-five-year-old son of a prominent member of Egypt's ruling National Democratic Party, is on the phone from Cairo and laughing. “I didn't know there was such a thing as a poor Jew,” he says. “What? Poor Jews? How did that happen? I thought that at your bar mitzvah you got full membership and the manual for how to rule the world. And then they give you your shares in the media. I keep telling my friends, if the Jews really control the media, they are some of the most self-hating Jews I've ever met in my life.”

Developing a complex picture of Jews, and of Israelis (the distinction between the two is not often made in the Arab world), is no easy task in Egypt. Even for someone like Sandmonkey, who comes from what he calls an “upper middle-class family,” and was educated largely outside his birth country, the distorted perceptions run deep. “The Egyptians know nothing about the Israelis,” he says. “We don't know anything about Israeli society. We don't know anything about their culture. And part of that has been our government trying to keep us away from the information. An Israeli can come into Egypt very easily. For an Egyptian to go to Israel, it's really, really hard to do. You have to go through a large bureaucratic process. And the point is to keep us in the dark. Don't humanize the people. It's easier to vilify the Jews in Israel.”

Maybe the most dramatic way in which this blogosphere is affecting the Arab world is by breaking down that ultimate taboo. Even in a place like Lebanon, with a large portion of the population striving to create a liberal, modern society, Israel is the last barrier. That is rooted in Lebanon's history, including recent history. Yet there is so much investment in seeing Israel as the source of all its problems that it has become a mindless reflex for many.

There are, of course, plenty of bloggers who use the Internet as a way to disseminate more hate and misunderstanding, many of whom also gained attention last summer during the war. One case, infamous among Arab and Israeli bloggers, is Perpetual Refugee, a Lebanese businessman who had occasion to visit Israel a few times, socialized with Israelis (even sharing a bottle of wine with Lisa

Goldman), and subsequently wrote friendly posts about making peace. As soon as the war came, he made what was described as a “360-degree turn,” becoming virulently hateful about Jews, about how Israel “massacred innocent souls to fulfill its biblical destiny.” But Perpetual Refugee was something of a high-profile anomaly among the English-language bloggers.

“I always say there are two kinds of arguments,” says Sandmonkey. “There are the arguments in which you hope to find the truth and the arguments in which you want to defend an established truth.” It's the first type of argument that seems to be prevailing. Take this post by Charles Malik (also a pseudonym), a Lebanese blogger, who found himself exploring the Israeli blogosphere last April, by chance on Holocaust Remembrance Day. He asks questions that would seem almost blasphemous considering the climate in the Middle East:

Think about what Israelis deal with on a daily basis: frequent suicide bombs, support for such attacks by the popularly elected Palestinian government, threats of annihilation from a country arming itself with nuclear weapons, constant words of hate from the Arabic speaking world, and remembrances of the Holocaust . . . Not knowing about “them” is the worst crime we can commit. It invalidates them as humans, as if they don't even matter. They are Stalin's faceless enemy, the rabid dog, the evil bloodsuckers whom it is righteous to kill. Our papers definitely need to start covering more than major political events in Israel. We should remember their tragedies.

If the Arab bloggers tend to be those who have been exposed to the West, many of the Israelis interacting with them are recent immigrants like Lisa Goldman, who arrived six years ago, and Liron Rabinowitz, who has been living in Israel for a year and a half. Rabinowitz shares his blog with a Lebanese woman and was recently invited to be a co-author on the United Arab Emirates community blog and, even more surprisingly, on an annual Ramadan blog, in which various bloggers write about how the Muslim holiday is celebrated in their countries. Recently, on the UAE blog, he was accused in the comments section of being needlessly provocative for putting the words “Tel Aviv” after his name at the end of his posts. To his surprise, a number of Arab readers rushed to his defense in the comments section.

Rabinowitz says that perusing the Arab blogosphere has deepened his understanding of what is happening inside Arab society. “When I go to them, I see what are they worrying about, what are they wondering, how they are feeling, what level of analysis they are putting on things, how keen they are to see my side, and when they are only prepared to see their own. Is there room for bridging? And I learn a lot about what their knee-jerk reac-

tion looks like, what their analysis looks like, what their fears look like." And to him, that added layer of knowledge is a rebuke to the other forces in Israeli society that he feels are trying to define the "enemy" for him. "You want to tell me that these people are stupid? Well, they're not," says Rabinowitz. "You want to tell me that these people want to live in a dictatorship? Well, they don't. You want to tell me that they can't be Muslim and tolerant and friendly at the same time? Well, it's wrong. You want to tell me that they hate me just because they're Muslim and I'm Jewish? Well that's wrong, too. And they prove that to me every day. And I get this amazing opportunity to dispel every demonic myth and every stupid stereotype that I could have ever thought of, and that's amazingly liberating."

Is this hopeful? Yes, as long as one keeps in mind, once again, what a small segment of the population, both Arab and Israeli, is sitting in front of glowing screens and reaching out to the "other." The bloggers will say, universally, that revolutions almost always start with a tiny elite. But we are a long way from this revolution's doorstep. Instead, this blogosphere feels more like a small community of open-minded young people who have discovered pathways that were previously closed.

Still, seeds do grow. The grass-roots student wing of the civil rights movement, born at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1960, in

what evolved into the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (or SNCC), was made up of young people, privileged enough to be attending college but not content with the pace of integration in America. They made themselves into a vanguard, tearing holes in walls so that others could then pass through after them. Someone had to take the first step, and who better than they — young, educated, and sensitive to the restrictions that were going to be placed on their personal and communal advancement.

The young insider-outsiders of the Middle East, blogging openly about their frustrations with the Arab world, about its persistent prejudices and limitations, as a way of liberalizing their societies, are doing what the front line of any social movement does — they say the unspeakable, they form the bonds that were previously unthinkable, they stand in the places that they are not supposed to stand. The Arab world will reform only when mindsets begin to change and a culture of dissent burgeons where it has never been allowed to exist openly before. If there is a way to kick-start this process, it is surely in the post of a twentysomething blogger wondering out loud why things can't be more open, more transparent — more different. ■

Gal Beckerman is a reporter for CJR Daily (www.cjrdaily.org).

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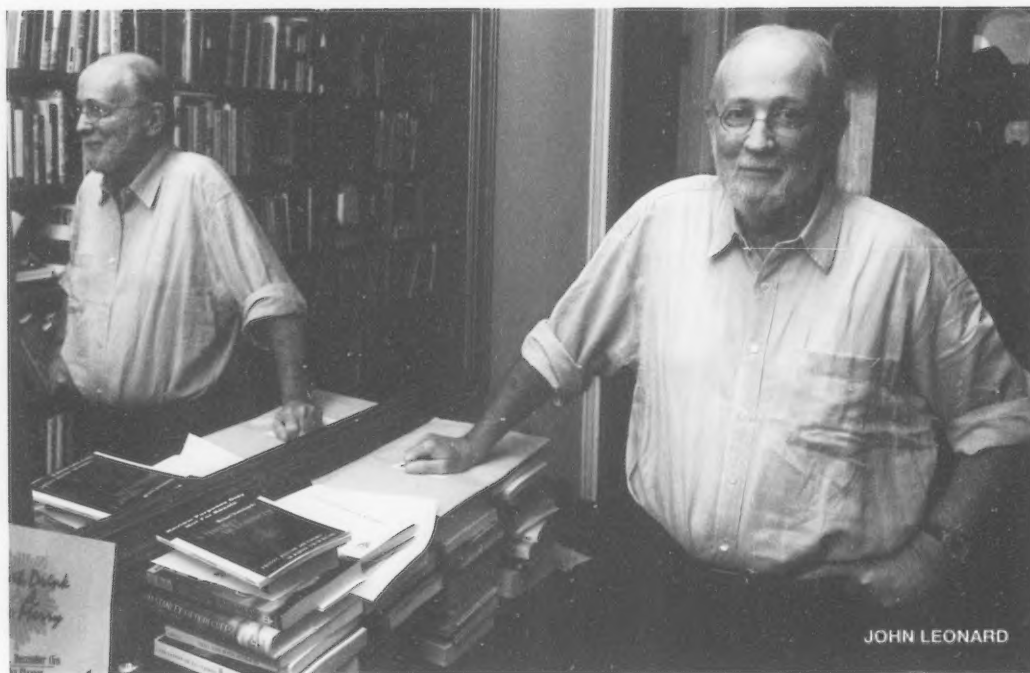
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andrew.leckey@businessjournalism.org; 480-727-9186

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Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Communication
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Funded by a grant from the Las Vegas, Nevada-based
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Why you should trust the literary critic John Leonard
on the coarsening of our intellectual culture

THE ENTHUSIAST



BY MEGHAN O'ROURKE

John Leonard was a literary prodigy who became editor of *The New York Times Book Review* at the tender age of thirty-two; today he is sixty-seven, and during a recent interview with Bill Moyers, sounded very much like a "lion in winter." He has been writing cultural criticism in mainstream newspapers and magazines — among them *The New York Times*, *New York, Harper's*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *The Nation* — since 1960. Yet for those readers who have encountered his writing piecemeal over the years — an essay here, a review there — it may be hard

to trace the contours of his critical persona. Unlike James Wood, the chief literary critic of *The New Republic*, he doesn't have a grand theory of fiction; unlike Michael Dirda, a senior editor at *The Washington Post Book World*, he is not a man of belles lettres; unlike the novelist and essayist Dale Peck, he is not a pugilist. He is neither a Freudian, nor a Marxist, nor a proponent of one aesthetic camp or another. Rather, his is the role of the discerning enthusiast, the Saturday reviewer who has read far more than most people and who writes about his discoveries with greater attention, insight, and fe-

licity of self-expression than most of us can muster on any day of the week.

It would be fine to leave it at that, if it weren't that the word "enthusiast" sounds dilettantish, somehow not quite *serious*. So let us try this: John Leonard is our primary progressive, catholic literary critic; he is also, with the exception of Susan Sontag, the best American literary critic to come of age in the 1960s, when the destabilizing forces of rock 'n' roll and popular culture ransacked Axel's Castle, that modernist symbol of aesthetic detachment, and began throwing parties in the inner keep. Like Sontag and Camille Paglia, Leonard has been one of the few literary essayists who can make sense of the erosion of highbrow culture, ruining elements of its loss while embracing the forces of popular culture. He is a man who loves The Beatles and Arthur Koestler, Joan Baez and William Wordsworth; and whom we can trust, now, when he worries that our intellectual culture is being, if not "dumbed down," then coarsened. He may be an "old fart," as he describes himself. But in outlook he is still a young progressive — the word-drunk man who has done for literary criticism what Lester Bangs did for rock journalism.

"I am aware that my own regard for books is overly worshipful," Leonard observed in a state-of-the-culture essay from his most recent collection, *Lonesome Rangers*. The bluntness about his own weakness is characteristic, a sign of the deep self-consciousness that imbues his writing. That self-consciousness helped Leonard cultivate a vibrant critical voice in the 1960s and '70s. But as the world of literary journalism is being shaken yet again — this time, by the shrinking coverage of books in the mainstream press and the simultaneous growth of the blogosphere — one wonders whether Leonard's particular critical virtues, his combination of idiosyncratic rigor and off-the-cuff immediacy, will find ways to survive and thrive.

A critic's reputation is usually a function of his or her authority and expertise. But Leonard came of age in an era when authority itself became suspect. Born in 1939 to an Episcopalian mother and an Irish Catholic father, he grew up in Long Beach, California. As an undergraduate at Harvard in the late 1950s, Leonard was schooled in the New Criticism, a method of analysis that focuses exclusively on a literary work's formal characteristics. "I was hit over the head with it, but I knew I didn't like it, because I knew I liked social context and politics and history. So I read Freud, I read Marx, I read theory. When theory takes over, I cease to be interested, but you need to try on all these glasses." After getting his B.A., Leonard went on to work in the antiwar movement and the civil rights movement. His reading was shaped by his politics, and his politics shaped his reading.

Along the way, he began reviewing books, and writing novels, and in 1967 he came to New York as a junior editor at *The New York Times Book Review*.

By 1971, he had been named the Book Review's editor in chief — "through a series of accidents, deaths," he says. He turned it into a provocative and combative section that many still think represents a high point in the publication's history. On the cover, he put reviews of daring novels by relative unknowns (like *End Zone*, Don DeLillo's second novel), and he published thoughtful reviews of the literature of debate surrounding the Vietnam War. After he stepped down, in 1975, he began reviewing books as a daily critic for the *Times*, and, later, movies and TV for other venues, including

In his outlook, Leonard is still a young progressive — the word-drunk man who has done for literary criticism what Lester Bangs did for rock journalism.

CBS Sunday Morning and *New York*. Although he has written widely on popular culture, he considers literary criticism to be his true vocation. "I love pop culture. I reviewed TV for decades and got a kick out of it, but nobody is going to tell me that there are deeper abiding complexities and discomfures than those I find in great literature," he says. And it is in his literary criticism that the outlines of a powerful life of the mind truly take shape.

Leonard has published six essay collections — *This Pen for Hire* (1973), *Private Lives in the Imperial City* (1979), *The Last Innocent White Man in America* (1993), *Smoke and Mirrors* (1997), *When the Kissing Had to Stop* (1999), and *Lonesome Rangers* (2002) — and to read any one of them is to be struck by how the pieces speak to one another. A Leonard collection is not a miscellany. From the start, his work has expressed powerful ambivalences about inherited systems of thinking. His main strength, as a reader of fiction and literary nonfiction, is the way he complicates what are often framed as zero-sum debates. Among his best writing in recent years is an essay on Primo Levi that scrutinizes the assumption of some critics — the novelist Cynthia Ozick among them — that Levi was too forgiving of the Holocaust, too willing to put his hatred and damage aside. For those critics, Levi's final book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, in which he writes about the horrors of camp prisoners' collaborating with Nazis to avoid being exterminated, marks an ascent to form because it finally unleashes Levi's rage and hate. But for Leonard, it

is a further tragedy, the manifestation of the encroaching unbalance that led Levi, finally, to kill himself. The earlier Levi, he suggests, "argues that perhaps something of the best of us, skeptical, ironic and aware, could outlive the worst." Why wish for those who bring us news from horror to have no sense of forgiveness?

If the primary mode of literary criticism is exposition, Leonard's method tends to be immersion. His reviews rarely treat a single book by the author at hand; rather, he gathers together a mass of textual and biographical materials. In his essays on Saul Bellow, Bruce Chatwin, Ralph Ellison, Bernard Malamud, Bob

Leonard decries the sense of opportunism and entitlement that many young critics bring to the table. 'Reviewing has all become performance art, it's all become posturing.'

Dylan, and, more recently, Jonathan Lethem, Rick Moody, and Jonathan Franzen, he peers closely at "those masks, sacred and profane, that the artist wears while digging up the buried bodies and playing with the bones." Instead of merely analyzing a book, he brings to life an entire literary sensibility, warts and all, animating each writer's larger outlook.

Leonard himself has a novelist's knack for memorable characterization. He has called Edmund Wilson "an alcoholic minotaur," and has described Joan Didion as a journalist writing "gnomic haikus" while "wearing a bikini and a migraine to every convulsion of the post-war culture." Leonard is also a connoisseur of the aphorism. From a 1981 essay on literary status: "A curmudgeon is different from a snob. A snob can be disdainful in only one direction; a curmudgeon spreads his contumely around." From a 1977 essay on literature about businessmen: "Kafka looked in the mirror and saw the modern corporation." At times, he is diverted by insider punning and overly dense allusions — too much so, for example, in the opening of "Knee-Deep in the Alien Corn," an essay from *When the Kissing Had to Stop*, in which he writes, "Forget Seinfeld — a cheese doodle of urban fecklessness in which, to every penis joke, the white bread slackers wore a prophylactic smirk." Still, his wordplay is often illuminating and enlivening. It reminds us there are as many ways of talking about literature as there are of writing a short story.

As a critic, Leonard wants to be part of no club that will have him. He is skeptical of anyone who espouses, too avidly, an affection for postmodernism or a retreat to traditionalism. In his view, there is a dis-

tinct set of (sometimes unrecognized) writers who have furthered the idiom of American fiction. Often, but certainly not always, those are writers with an interest in American radicalism; often, but not always, their prose is incantatory, rhythmic, inventive — writers like Didion, DeLillo, Richard Powers, and Toni Morrison. Leonard, in fact, was among the first reviewers to canonize Morrison's novel *Beloved*, in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, where he wrote in 1987: "*Beloved* belongs on the highest shelf of American literature, even if half a dozen canonized white boys have to be elbowed off." Morrison would end up being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1993, and last spring, *Beloved* was named the best novel of the past twenty-five years by a panel of literary critics and novelists. In a piece Leonard wrote when Morrison received the Nobel in Sweden — he traveled to the ceremony — the critic of no club delighted in seeing a female African American author being welcomed into the ur-club.

Those who don't like Leonard's criticism often claim that he is, especially in recent years, too "nice." Perhaps. "When I was young I loved to slash and burn, and that has definitely changed," he says. "I obviously am disinclined in these autumnal days to trashing anything. Occasionally you have to write something negative, because an important writer has written a book that you feel is symptomatic of something deeply wrong with culture — like Norman Podhoretz's last book."

It's a shame, in a way, that Leonard doesn't slash and burn more frequently, since his attack on Podhoretz's *Ex-Friends*, "Norman Podhoretz, Alone at Last," is lucid, hilarious, sharp-tongued, and perspicacious, a send-up of not only Podhoretz but the broader schmoozing involved in being part of the punditocracy, and the literary world, today. "There can be no more authoritarian an intellectual," he writes, infuriated by Podhoretz's put-downs of gay men and feminists, "than the one who ordains that everybody else in the democratic motley must look and behave exactly like him."

Leonard has described himself as a "lapsed Catholic," and there's a case to be made that his religious upbringing (or lack of it) informs his criticism. He was raised Episcopalian, but as a fourteen-year-old he found some rosary beads in a drawer and asked his mother whose they were; she told him they were his, and that she had promised his father to raise him Catholic. "So I did what any teenage boy would do, and I tried to become Catholic, in a punk, adolescent way," he told me, and began to read the major Catholic writers — Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, Thomas Merton. Sometime later he "came out the other end, an agnostic atheist."

Today, Leonard is sensitive to the strains of grace

that turn up in writers from John Cheever to Don DeLillo. Reviewing Cheever's final novel, *Ob What a Paradise It Seems* — a book no one wanted to review, because Cheever was dying, and the novel was bad — Leonard struck a middle road, critiquing Cheever's self-cannibalizing tendencies, but looking for the motivating curiosity, and using the novel as an occasion to summarize the value of the writer's outlook:

It seems to me that Cheever speaks not so much of failures of luck and charm and nerve as of failures of faith. How to be brave and good? He mobilizes language in the service of decencies and intuitions that are no longer sanctioned at any altar or practiced in any politics. His stories are brilliant prayers on behalf of "the perfumes of life: seawater, the smoke of burning hemlock, and the breasts of women." If his church, emphatically Episcopalian, is just another "ruined cathedral," then he will look for a sacred grove at Beasley's Pond. . . . The heart is a compass; there is inside our mess of memory and desire a moral pole toward which the knowing needle swings and points. Something will be required of us: an extravagance, a surprise, a rhapsody, a proof, "the stamina of love, a presence (we feel) like the beginnings of some stair." Be ready. It could happen anywhere, in the Balkans or in Shady Hill or even in Chicago. It often does, if the prayer was written by John Cheever.

This is a fabulous passage of writing as well as an astute summation of Cheever's ethos. It reminds us that Cheever wasn't merely a writer of suburban ennui, but a believer, of sorts. It is also metaphorical, allusive, ambivalent — powerfully drawn.

For all the stock Leonard places in the importance of reviewing, he stalwartly guards against the inflation of self-regard that encroaches on most experts. American literary critics of a strong political bent have been the worst among them, assigning a level of importance and historical necessity to their opinions that Leonard finds specious. "The Partisan Reviewers" — Philip Rahv, Mary McCarthy, Norman Mailer — "were never as important as they thought they were. Nobody could be, and intellectuals never are," he writes in his essay on *Ex-Friends*.

Such suspicion of intellectual arrogance is behind the impulse to dismantle one's pretenses in public that runs through Leonard's essay collections; it is an impulse that all critics might take to heart. Critics, after all, play games in their reviews, often preening and primping at the expense of the writer. As Leonard put it, reviewing a biography of Saul Bellow by James Atlas, "A hoary old reviewer's scam is to pretend you already knew all the inside stuff before you ever read the biography you're about to quibble with by poaching from. Let me be upfront: Almost everything I know about Bellow that I didn't guess from reading him I got from the encyclopedic Atlas." For all his knowledge, Leonard has been able

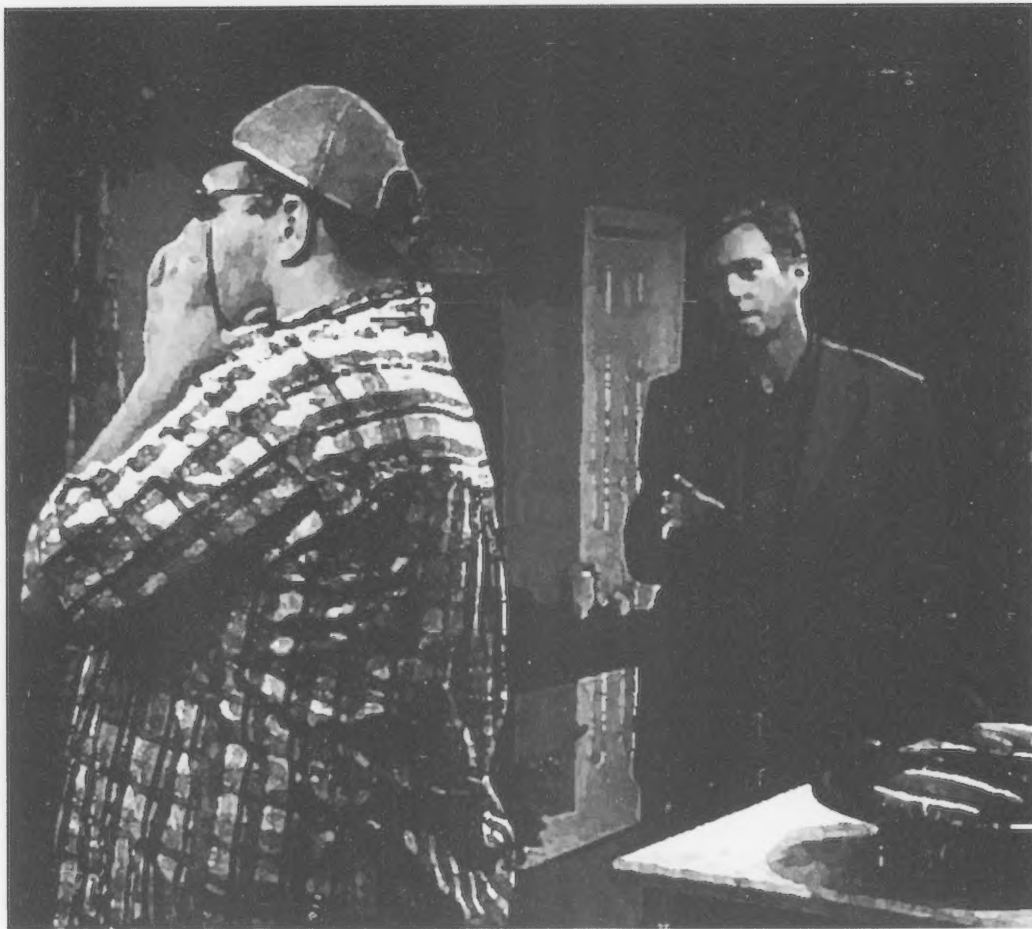
to build into his writing a form of ambivalence and questioning, and it's this point of view that separates the good reviewer from the great critic. Writing about why he travels, he says, "I want to go anywhere, and to feel ambivalent about it," explaining that what he most desires is to "dislocate myself." It's an apt summation of his critical approach.

These days, Leonard finds himself feeling a little too dislocated. He worries that the dry season of literary culture has arrived. "You talk about this and you begin to sound like an old fart," he says. "You hear it coming out of your mouth and you wonder whether anything you're saying is true. But it seemed there was a greater number of serious reviews. And there was certainly a better quality of book reviewing. Certainly at magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*; it's a scandal what they're doing now," he says, noting how little space they give to serious books. In his mind, it's not just the shrinking number of pages that is the problem; it's also the sense of opportunism and entitlement that many young critics, wanting to make a name for themselves, bring to the table. "Reviewing has all become performance art; it's all become posturing. It's going to have to be the lit blogs that save us. At least they have passion." But even a fan of literary blogs may wonder if their enthusiasm is enough; passion is a crucial aspect of literary criticism, but passion alone doesn't produce the essayists of the sort who shape our deepest thinking about our literary culture.

Leonard also believes that young reviewers aren't encouraged to diversify their knowledge base. In one journalism class he taught, students told him they didn't want to read some of the critics and novelists on the assigned reading list because "they didn't want to be influenced." Influence, in Leonard's mind, is an asset — the way we become versed in the language of criticism. "I think a young critic has to find a situation, paying or not, where they can expand, not specialize. But you've got to throw yourself into deep water. You've got to review a writer whose other books you have to read and that means you have to find a comfortable place with an editor who is elastic enough You only find your voice by using it on a variety of subjects, not just repeating the same tune."

The poet William Wordsworth once wrote of "The marble index of a mind forever/voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone" — lines that Leonard recently quoted in an essay on the book *Herman Melville*, by Elizabeth Hardwick. One can see why these lines might appeal to a literary critic. It is not quite apt, though. John Leonard's mind is not a marble index, but three-dimensional, contoured, and warm with the palpable energy of a life lived in the strange and complicating literary seas of ambivalence. ■

Meghan O'Rourke is the culture editor of Slate.



'To Catch a Predator' gets the ratings, but at what cost?

THE SHAME GAME

BY DOUGLAS McCOLLAM

It was just before 3 p.m. on a Sunday afternoon last November when a contingent of police gathered outside the home of Louis Conradt Jr., a longtime county prosecutor living in the small community of Terrell, Texas, just east of Dallas. Though the fifty-six-year-old Conradt was a colleague of some of the officers, they hadn't come to discuss a case or for a backyard barbecue. Rather, the veteran district attorney, who had prosecuted hundreds of felonies during more than two decades in law en-

forcement, was himself the target of an unusual criminal probe. For weeks the police in the nearby town of Murphy had been working with the online watchdog group Perverted Justice and producers from *Dateline NBC's* popular "To Catch a Predator" series in an elaborate sting operation targeting adults cruising the Internet to solicit sex from minors. *Dateline* had leased a house in an upscale subdivision, outfitted it with multiple hidden cameras, and hired actors to impersonate minors to help lure suspects into the

Chris Hansen, of "To Catch a Predator," confronts a suspect in the September 13, 2006, episode.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION/CJR

trap. As with several similar operations previously conducted by *Dateline*, there was no shortage of men looking to score with underage boys and girls. In all, twenty-four men were caught in the Murphy sting, including a retired doctor, a traveling businessman, a school teacher, and a Navy veteran.

Conradt had never shown up at the *Dateline* house, but according to the police, using the screen name "inx00," he did engage in explicit sexual exchanges in an Internet chat room with someone he believed to be a thirteen-year-old boy (but was actually a volunteer for Perverted Justice). Under a Texas law adopted in 2005 to combat Internet predators, it is a second-degree felony to have such communications with someone under the age of fourteen, even if no actual sexual contact takes place. Armed with a search warrant — and with a *Dateline* camera crew on the scene — the police went to Conradt's home to arrest him. When the prosecutor failed to answer the door or answer phone calls, police forced their way into the house. Inside they encountered the prosecutor in a hallway holding a semiautomatic handgun. "I'm not going to hurt anybody," Conradt reportedly told the police. Then he fired a single bullet into his own head.

Standing outside the house with his crew, the *Dateline* correspondent Chris Hansen said he did not hear the shot that ended Conradt's life, but did see his body wheeled out on a gurney. Discussing Conradt's death over lunch a couple of weeks later, I asked Hansen how it made him feel. Hansen said his first reaction was as a newsman who had to cover the story for his network (Hansen filed a report the next morning for NBC's *Today* show). Hansen said that on a human level Conradt's death was a tragedy that, naturally, he felt bad about. But he understood the true import of my question: "If you're asking do I feel responsible, no," Hansen said. "I sleep well at night."

Others aren't so sanguine. Galen Ray Sumrow, the criminal district attorney of Rockwall County, Texas, who heads the office where Conradt worked as an assistant district attorney, has reviewed evidence surrounding the case and believes it was badly botched. Among the problems he cites are that the search warrant obtained by the Murphy police officers was defective because it had the wrong date and listed the wrong county for service, basic errors that he believes would have gotten any evidence seized from Conradt's home tossed out of court. He is also mystified as to why the police would force their way into Conradt's home when they could have tried to talk him out, or just picked him up at work the next day. "He was here in the office every morning," says Sumrow, who is himself a former police officer and has been prosecuting cases for more than twenty years. "You generally like to do an arrest like that away from the home to avoid things like what happened." A sworn affidavit supporting the warrant also shows that the

information about Conradt's online activities was given to the Murphy police by Perverted Justice just hours before they went to arrest him. Why were the police in such a rush to pick up Conradt? Texas Rangers are investigating that question, but Sumrow thinks he knows the answer: "It's reality television," he says. Sumrow says an investigator told him the police pushed things because the *Dateline* people had plane tickets to fly home that afternoon and wanted to get the bust on film for the show. He says investigators also told him that film excerpts show *Dateline*

Reality TV has so altered the broadcast landscape that traditional news-magazine fare — no matter how provocative — just doesn't cut it anymore.

personnel, including Hansen, interacting with police on the scene, supplying them with information, and advising them on tactics. Sergeant Snow Robertson of the Murphy police says accommodating *Dateline*'s schedule "wasn't a factor at all." Rather, he says, the urgency was to keep Conradt from contacting another minor. *Dateline*'s Hansen confirms that he was to fly out that Sunday, but says such plans are always subject to change and that he hadn't even checked out of his hotel. He also denies advising the police during the operation at Conradt's house. "This stuff is not remotely based in fact," Hansen says.

At a town meeting called to discuss the *Dateline* sting operations, several Murphy residents expressed outrage that a parade of suspected sexual predators were lured to their community. Neighbors recounted police takedowns and car chases on their blocks, and some said fleeing suspects tossed drugs and other contraband into their yards. In a statement to the Murphy City Council, Conradt's sister, Patricia, directly implicated *Dateline* in her brother's death. "I will never consider my brother's death a suicide," she said. "It was an act precipitated by the rush to grab headlines where there was no evidence that there was any emergency other than to line the pockets of an out-of-control group and a TV show pressed for ratings and a deadline." She added: "When these people came after him for a news show, it ended his life." In an interview, she was even more direct: "They have blood on their hands," she said, referring to *Dateline*, the police, and Perverted Justice.

In a sense, Conradt's death was a tragedy foretold. In a piece for *Radar* magazine about the show, the writer John Cook quoted an unnamed *Dateline* producer as saying that "one of these guys is going to

go home and shoot himself in the head." When I asked Hansen and David Corvo, *Dateline's* executive producer, if they were reviewing the show's procedures in light of Conradt's death, both said that there was no evidence to suggest that Conradt was aware of *Dateline's* presence when he shot himself (though a camera crew was apparently on his block for hours before the police arrived), and that there were no plans to alter how the "Predator" series is handled. "I still feel like the show is a public service," said Corvo. "We do investigations that expose people doing things not good for them. You can't predict the unintended consequences of that. You have to

The 'Predator' series, says David Corvo, *Dateline's* executive producer, is just another form of enterprise journalism, one suited to the Internet age.

let the chips fall where they may."

The reluctance to tinker with the show's formula is no doubt attributable to the fact that since its debut in the fall of 2004, "To Catch a Predator" has been the rarest of rare birds in the television news world: a clear ratings winner. The show regularly outdraws NBC's other primetime fare. It succeeds by tapping into something that has been part of American culture since the Puritans stuck offenders in the stockade: public humiliation. The notion of delighting in another's disgrace drives much of the reality TV phenomenon, and is present in the DNA of everything from *Judge Judy* to *Jackass* to *Borat*. "Predator" couples this with a hyped-up fear of Internet sex fiends, creating a can't-miss formula. The show's ratings success has made it a sweeps-week staple and turned Chris Hansen into something of a pop-culture icon. To date, by the show's own count, it has netted 238 would-be predators, thirty-six of whom have either pleaded guilty or been convicted. Hansen regularly gives talks to schools and parent groups concerned about Internet sex predators, and he was even summoned to Washington to testify before a congressional subcommittee investigating the problem, where he and *Dateline* received effusive praise for their efforts. When the comedian Conan O'Brien filmed a bit to open this year's Emmy Awards that showed him parading through the sets of hit shows of every network, his last stop was a "Predator" house where Hansen confronted him and O'Brien gave a spot-on rendition of the sweaty, shaky dissembling that most of the show's targets display.

All that is a long way from where "To Catch a Predator" started. The *Dateline* producer Lynn Keller

says she first contacted the Perverted Justice group about the possibility of doing a show in January or February of 2004. Perverted Justice had already worked with several local television stations, including one in Detroit, where Chris Hansen knew one of the producers and had talked with him about a sting operation the station had filmed using Perverted Justice's online expertise to lure targets. *Dateline's* first sting house was set up in Bethpage, Long Island, about an hour outside of New York City. Hansen recalls being nervous that no one would show up and that he might have to explain to the network why he had blown a bunch of money on a flop investigation. "We thought we might get one person," Keller recalls. They needn't have worried. Before he could even reach the house for the first day of filming, Hansen got a frantic call from Keller that the first target was inbound. Hansen beat him there by just fifteen minutes.

The Long Island sting netted eighteen suspects in two and a half days. Eight months later, the show set up a sting house in Fairfax, Virginia (at a home belonging to a friend of Hansen's in the FBI), and snared nineteen more men, including a rabbi, an emergency-room doctor, a special-education teacher, and an unemployed man claiming to be a teacher, who memorably walked into the house naked. The third show, filmed in early 2006 in southern California, drew fifty-one men over three days. But even as the stings expanded and ratings soared, critics inside and outside the network raised serious questions about whether "To Catch a Predator" was erasing lines that even an increasingly tabloid newsmagazine show should respect.

To begin with, the show has an undeniable "ick" factor. The men (and to date they are all men) are mostly losers who show up packing booze and condoms. It is also undeniably compelling television. Each show follows a similar pattern: after asking the mark to come in, the decoy disappears to change clothes or go to the bathroom. Then, in a startling switcheroo, Hansen appears from off-stage and directs the man to take a seat. The men almost always comply, concluding that Hansen is either a cop or a father. The marks then proffer comical denials about what they are doing at the house, which never include their intent to have sex with a minor. Hansen then produces some particularly salacious details from their Internet chat with the decoy ("But you said you couldn't wait to pour chocolate syrup all over her and lick it off with your tongue"). The mark then switches gears to say he has never done anything like this before and was just kidding around or role playing, which in turn cues Hansen to say something like, "Well, you're playing on a big stage, because I'm Chris Hansen from *Dateline NBC*," at which point cameras enter from off stage like furies summoned from hell. The mark, now fully perceiving his ruin, usually excuses himself, often pausing to shake hands with Hansen — the cult of celebrity

apparently transcends even this awful reality — then exits into the waiting arms of police outside who swarm him as if he had just shot the president.

The police busts are the emotional capper to the encounter, one that highlights the show's uncomfortably close affiliation with law enforcement. On the first two "Predator" stings, the show didn't involve arrests, an omission that garnered complaints from viewers and cops alike. Though certain individuals from the initial episodes were subsequently prosecuted, the lack of police involvement from the outset made it hard to make cases that would stick. "The number one complaint from viewers was that we let them walk out," says Keller. Starting with the third show and in the five subsequent stings, police were waiting to take down the suspects. In our interview and in his congressional testimony, Hansen is careful to refer to those arrests as "parallel" police investigations, as if they just happened to be running down the same track as *Dateline*, but the close cooperation is always evident. At a time when reporters are struggling to keep law enforcement from encroaching on newsgathering, *Dateline*, which is part of NBC's news division, is inviting them in the front door — literally. Hansen tried to deflect this criticism of the show by saying that the volunteers from Perverted Justice serve as a "Chinese wall" between the news people at *Dateline* and the police.

But as we've learned from recent corporate scandals, such Chinese walls are often made of pretty thin tissue. In the case of "To Catch a Predator," Perverted Justice does most of the groundwork preparing the shows and roping in the men. Initially, *Dateline's* responsibility was to cover the group's expenses, procure the house and outfit it with hidden cameras and, of course, supply Chris Hansen and airtime. However, after the third successful "Predator" show, Perverted Justice hired an agent and auctioned its services to several networks. NBC ended up retaining the group for a fee reported in *The Washington Post* and elsewhere to be between \$100,000 and \$150,000. Hansen would not confirm an amount but said he saw nothing wrong with compensating the group for its services, likening it to the way the news division will sometimes keep a retired general or FBI agent on retainer. "In the end I get paid, the producers get paid, the camera guy, why shouldn't they?" says Hansen.

On the surface that certainly seems reasonable, but it ignores a few relevant points. First, Perverted Justice is a participant in the story, the kind of outfit that would traditionally be covered, not be on the news outlet's payroll. "It's an advocacy group intensely involved in this story," says Robert Steele, who teaches journalism ethics at The Poynter Institute. "That's different from hiring a retired general who is no longer involved in a policy-making role." Second, it is clearly

a no-no, even at this late date in the devolution of TV news, to directly pay government officials or police officers. Yet in effect that's what *Dateline* did in at least one of its stings. The police in Darke County, Ohio, where *Dateline* set up its fourth sting in April 2006, insisted that personnel from Perverted Justice be deputized for the operation so as not to compromise the criminal cases it wished to bring against the targets. After some discussion, NBC's lawyers agreed to the arrangement, which the network shrugs off as less than ideal but an isolated circumstance.

Further, though Hansen and *Dateline* reject allegations that they are engaging in paycheck journalism by paying Perverted Justice — arguing for a distinction between paying a consultant and paying a source for information — the line looks a little fuzzy. For example, Xavier von Erck, who founded Perverted Justice, says via e-mail that the operation had come to a point where it could "not bear any further costs relating to the shows. Hence, we obtained a consulting fee." In turn, local law enforcement groups have stated that without the resources provided by Perverted Justice they couldn't afford to do the criminal investigations they've mounted in conjunction with the "To Catch a Predator" series. See the problem? But for NBC's deep pockets, no "parallel" police actions would take place. And are they really parallel? One lawyer I spoke with, who asked not be identified because her client's case is still pending, claims the man was entrapped and said she has every intention of subpoenaing members of *Dateline's* staff to testify if the case goes to trial. "They are acting as an arm of law enforcement and are material witnesses," the lawyer said. "They definitely crossed a line."

There is also the question of whether the series is fair to its targets. Let's concede up front that this is an unsympathetic bunch of would-be perverts. But are they really that dangerous? Hansen himself divides those snared in the probes into three groups: dangerous predators, Internet pornography addicts, and sexual opportunists. But by Hansen's own calculation fewer than one in ten of the men who show up at a sting house have a previous criminal record.

But the image projected by the "Predator" series is clearly meant to inflame parental fears about violent Internet sex fiends. The show has invoked the specter of famous child abduction cases like Polly Klaas. The very term "predator" calls to mind the image of the drooling, trench-coated sex fiend hanging out at the local playground with a bag full of candy. Reading through the chat transcripts posted on the Perverted Justice Web site, however, it seems clear that a lot of the men snared aren't hardcore predators. Many express doubts about what they're doing and have to be egged along a bit by the decoys, many of whom come off as anything but innocent children. Consider a few of these exchanges. In the first, the mark (johnchess2000) is talking to someone he believes is an underage girl

(AJ's Girl). She has agreed to let him come over to watch a movie:

johnchess2000: anything you want me to wear or bring?
 AJ's Girl: hmm
 johnchess2000: wow your thinking for a long time
 AJ's Girl: lol sowwy
 AJ's Girl: u beter bring condoms
 johnchess2000: wow. condoms???
 johnchess2000: wow. your thinking big huh? ;0
 johnchess2000: ;)
 AJ's Girl: :")>
 johnchess2000: wow so you like me that much? :)
 AJ's Girl: maybe
 johnchess2000: maybe?? why did you say condoms?
 AJ's Girl: :")> i duno
 johnchess2000: haha. be honest
 johnchess2000: you must like me a lot then huh?
 AJ's Girl: yea
 AJ's Girl: ur cute

Or this exchange between Jason, a twenty-one-year-old fireman and the decoy, a girl he thinks is thirteen:

jteno72960: so what kinda guys u like
 katedidsings: hot firman 1s
 jteno72960: ok what else is sexy to you
 katedidsings: tats
 jteno72960: i have 2 inside my arm
 jteno72960: will u kiss them for me?
 katedidsings: ya
 jteno72960: what about on the lips
 katedidsings: ya
 jteno72960: i love to kiss
 katedidsings: me 2
 jteno72960: really what else
 katedidsings: i dunno watevr u wantd 2 do
 jteno72960: well what have u done
 katedidsings: evry thing
 katedidsings: wel not evrything
 katedidsings: but alot of stuff
 jteno72960: well what did u like
 katedidsings: from behind

Or this last exchange between Rob (rkline05) a twenty-year-old from Ohio, and *Dateline's* online decoy "Shia," who poses as an underage girl. After days of chatting, Rob expresses doubts about their age difference and about a sexual encounter, but Shia dismisses his concerns and reassures him:

rkline05: but idk about everything we talked about
 shyshiagirl: why not
 rkline05: well you sure you wana do all that
 shyshiagirl: yea why not
 rkline05: idk i just wasnt sure you wanted to you are a virgin and all
 rkline05: you sure you want it to be me that takes that
 shyshiagirl: yea why not. ur cool
 rkline05: i just..... you really sure i feel weird about it you being so much younger than me and all
 shyshiagirl: ur not old. dont feel weird

Rob came to the *Dateline* sting house and later pleaded guilty for soliciting a minor online.

Entrapment is a legal term best applicable to law enforcement. Perverted Justice says it's careful not to

initiate contact with marks, nor steer them into explicit sexual banter. But as these chats and others make clear, they are prepared to flirt, literally, with that line. Under most state statutes passed to combat online predators, the demonstrated intent to solicit sexual acts from a minor is sufficient to land you in jail regardless of whether the minor is a willing participant. So, as a legal matter, the enticements offered by the decoys are of little importance to the police, or to issue advocates like Perverted Justice. But journalistically it looks a lot like crossing the line from reporting the news to creating the news.

Dateline has run afoul of this distinction before. Famously, in 1993, several producers and correspondents were fired for rigging a General Motors truck to explode in a crash test. More recently the program took heat for bringing Muslim-looking men to a NASCAR race to see what might happen (the program never aired). "Predator" seems to fall somewhere between those two examples. Perhaps its most direct counterpart in recent journalistic history is the famous sting operation mounted by the *Chicago Sun Times*. In 1978 the paper set up the Mirage Tavern in Chicago and snared a host of city officials for seeking bribes from the "owners," who were actually undercover reporters. The Mirage was controversial in its day, but it seems tame by comparison to the *Dateline* stings. Al Tompkins, who teaches the ethics of television journalism at the Poynter Institute, draws a clear distinction between the Mirage and "Predator." Mirage, he notes, was targeted at public officials who were known to be abusing the power of their offices for personal enrichment. "It was a legit question whether you could have covered the story any other way," Tompkins says. "You couldn't go through law enforcement because you didn't know if police were involved in the corruption." Tompkins, who has watched the *Dateline* series, says it looks more like a police prostitution sting than a news investigation.

Dateline has argued that "Predator" serves a genuine public good, but it could be argued that, in fact, *Dateline* is doing the public a disservice. When Attorney General Alberto Gonzales gave a speech about a major initiative to combat the "growing problem" of Internet predators, he cited a statistic that 50,000 such would-be pedophiles were prowling the Net at any given moment and attributed it to *Dateline*. Jason McLure, a reporter at *Legal Times* in Washington, D.C., (where I was formerly an editor), asked the show about the number. *Dateline* told him that it had gotten it from a retired FBI agent who consulted with the show. When the agent was contacted he wasn't sure where the number had come from, terming it a "Goldilocks" figure — "Not small and not large." He added that it was the same figure that was used by the media to describe the number of people killed annually by Satanic cults in the 1980s, and before that was cited as the number of children abducted by strangers

each year in the 1970s. *Dateline* has now disowned the number, saying solid statistics about Internet predators are hard to find, but that the problem seems to be getting worse, a sentiment echoed by lawmakers in Congress.

But actually there isn't much evidence that it is getting worse. For example, many news reports have cited a Justice Department study as saying that one in five children is approached online by a sexual predator. But as Radford Benjamin of *The Skeptical Inquirer* pointed out, what that 2001 study actually said was that 19 percent had received a "sexual solicitation" online, about half of which came from other teens and none of which led to a sexual assault. According to the study, the number of teens aggressively solicited by adults online was about 3 percent. A more recent study by the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire found that the number of kids getting unwanted sexual advances on the Internet was in fact declining. In general, according to data compiled by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, more than 70 percent of sexual abuse of children is perpetrated by family members or family friends.

That doesn't mean Internet sex predators don't exist, but *Dateline* heavily skews reality by devoting hour after hour of primetime programming to the phenomenon. As Poynter's Tompkins notes: "Is there any other issue that's received that much airtime? The question is whether the level of coverage is proportional to the actual problem."

The answer, it seems, is no, and the explanation of why *Dateline* has seized on this mythical trend to anchor its venerable news show is that reality TV has so altered the broadcast landscape that traditional newsmagazine fare — no matter how provocative — just doesn't cut it anymore. "Reality programs came in and newsmagazines no longer looked so great," says one former producer for NBC News. While newsmagazines are cheap compared to other primetime shows, they don't have the potential to be gigantic hits like *Survivor* or *American Idol*. For that reason, the producer notes, the entertainment divisions at the networks never really liked newsmagazines, which they had little hand in producing and for which they received no credit. At NBC, the former producer says, Jeff Zucker, formerly the president of the network's news and entertainment group and now the c.e.o. of its television operations, regularly put the squeeze on *Dateline*, maintaining that the network needed its time slots to either develop new programming or schedule hit shows. "About the only thing they really want newsmagazines to do now is crime," says the former producer. "If it's not crime, they don't think they can sell it. The traditional investigative reporting on shows like *Dateline*, or *48 Hours*, or *Prime-time Live* is no more." (A notable exception, he says, is *60 Minutes*.)

Dateline's executive producer David Corvo prefers to see the change as a setting aside of older journalistic conventions to focus on new kinds of issues. The "Predator" series, he says, is just another form of enterprise journalism, one suited to the Internet age. But the distinction between enterprise and entertainment can be a difficult one. *Dateline* hasn't so much covered a story as created one. In the process it has further compromised the barrier between reporters and cops that is central to the mission of journalism. If humiliating perverts and needlessly terrifying parents is the best use that newsmagazines can make of hours of primetime television, then perhaps they should be allowed to die and the time given over to the blood sport of reality programming. At least no one would dare to call it news. ■

Douglas McCollam is a contributing editor to CJR.

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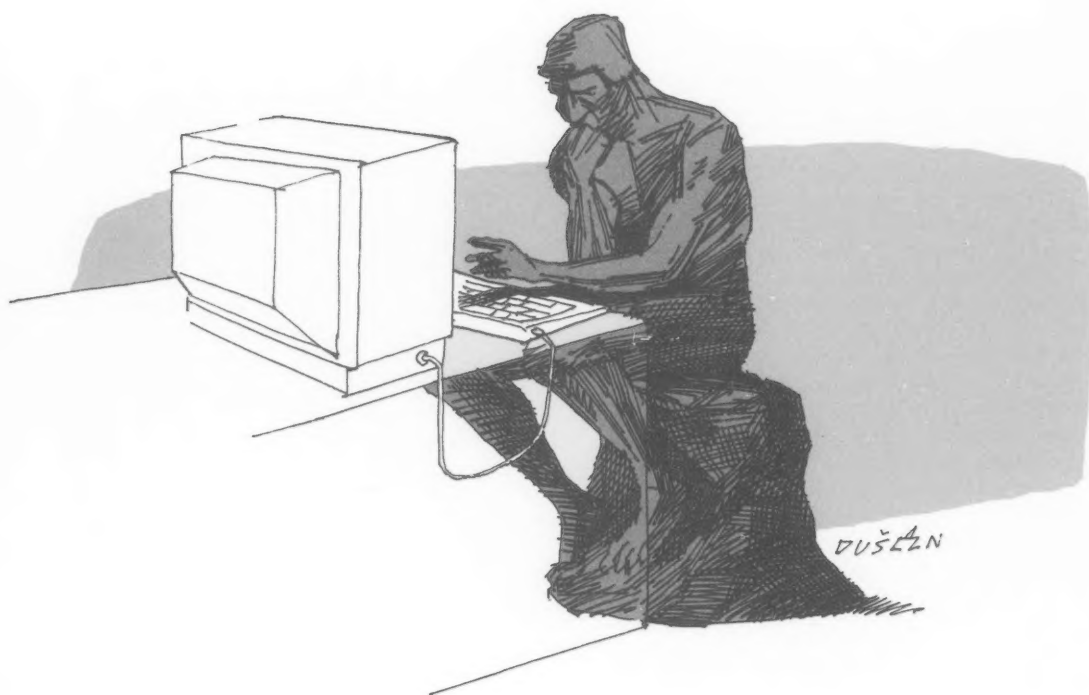
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Journalists worry about how the Web threatens the way they distribute their product. They are slower to see how it threatens the product itself.

BEYOND NEWS



BY MITCHELL STEPHENS

Call it the morning letdown. Your muffin may be fresh, but the newspaper beside it is decidedly stale.

CHAVEZ BASHES BUSH ON UN STAGE reads the headline, to pick one morning's example, on the lead story of *The Miami Herald*. That was a Thursday in September. But Yahoo, AOL, and just about every major news Web site in the country had been displaying that story — President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela had called President Bush “the devil” — since around noon on Wednesday. The news had been all over the radio, all over

cable, too: Fox News had carried, with gleeful indignation, twenty-three minutes of the speech live. Indeed, when Katie Couric introduced the Chavez story on the *CBS Evening News*, at 6:30 Wednesday, her audience may have experienced an evening letdown. By then — half a day before Chavez's name would appear in newsprint in Miami — his entry on Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, had been updated to include an account of the speech in the United Nations.

Editors and news directors today fret about the Internet, as their predecessors worried about

DUŠAN PETRICIC

radio and TV, and all now see the huge threat the Web represents to the way they distribute their product. They have been slower to see the threat it represents to the product itself. In a day when information pours out of digital spigots, stories that package painstakingly gathered facts on current events — what happened, who said what, when — arrive astoundingly fast from an astounding number of directions, it arrives free of charge. Selling what is elsewhere available free is difficult, even if it isn't nineteen hours stale. Just ask an encyclopedia salesman, if you can find one.

Mainstream journalists can, of course, try to keep retailing somewhat stale morning-print or evening-television roundups to people who manage to get

'The idea that a newspaper is going to be people's first port of call to find out what's going on in the world is no longer valid. You have to add another layer.'

— Simon Kelner, editor of *The Independent*

through the day without any contact with Matt Drudge, Wolf Blitzer, or Robert Siegel. They can continue to attempt to establish themselves online as a kind of après AP — selling news that's a little slower but a little smarter than what Yahoo displays, which is essentially what *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* were up to when, about four or five hours after Chavez had left the UN podium, they published, online, their own accounts of his speech.

But another, more ambitious option is available to journalists: They could try to sell something besides news.

The notion that journalists might be in a business other than the collection, ordering, and distribution of facts isn't new. In the days when the latest news was available to more or less anyone who visited the market or chatted in the street, weekly newspapers (at the time, the only newspapers) provided mostly analysis or opinion — something extra. The growth of cities, the arrival of dailies, and the invention of swift fact-transmitting and fact-distributing machines (the telegraph and the steam press) encouraged the development of companies devoted to the mass production and sale of news. Their day lasted more than a hundred years. But the sun is setting.

Information is once again widely available to more or less everyone, and journalists, once again, are having difficulty selling news — at least to people under the age of fifty-five. If news organizations,

large and small, remain in the business of routine newsgathering — even if they remain in the business of routine newsgathering for dissemination online — the dismal prophesy currently being proclaimed by their circulation and demographic charts may very well be fulfilled.

"If we don't do the basic reporting, who will?" journalists counter. Here's John S. Carroll, former editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, presenting, to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, this notion of mainstream journalists as the indispensable Prime Movers: "Newspapers dig up the news. Others repackage it." But the widely held belief that the Web is a parasite that lives off the metro desks and foreign bureaus of beleaguered yet civic-minded newspapers and broadcast news organizations is a bit facile.

For much of their breaking news, Yahoo and AOL often tap the same source as Drudge and *WashingtonPost.com*: The Associated Press, with Reuters, AFP, and a few others also playing a role. (Most of the early online Chavez reports linked to an AP story.) Nothing said here is meant to imply that the wire services, and whatever cousins of theirs may materialize on the Web, should stop gathering and wholesaling news in bulk.

However, the Web increasingly has other places to turn for raw materials: more and more cameras are being aimed at news events, and transcripts, reports, and budgets are regularly being placed on the Web, either by organizations themselves or by citizens trying to hold those organizations to account. We are still very early in the evolution of the form, but surely industrious bloggers won't always need reporters to package such materials before they commence picking them apart. Mainstream journalists are making a mistake if they believe their ability to collect and organize facts will continue to make them indispensable.

There will continue to be room, of course, for some kinds of traditional, thoroughly sourced reporting: exclusives, certainly. Investigations, certainly. That's something extra. Yahoo isn't in a position to muckrake.

But the extra value our quality news organizations can and must regularly add is analysis: thoughtful, incisive attempts to divine the significance of events — insights, not just information. What is required — if journalism is to move beyond selling cheap, widely available, staler-than-your-muffin news — is, to choose a not very journalistic-sounding word, wisdom.

Here's more historical precedent: In the days when dailies monopolized breaking news, slower journals — weeklies like *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Time* — stepped back from breaking news and sold smart analysis. Now it is the dailies, and even the

evening news shows, that are slow. Now it is time for them to take that step back.

Insights into the significance of news events certainly do appear on one page or another in our dailies, in one segment or another on our evening newscasts; but a reader or viewer has no reason to believe that they will be there on any particular story on any particular day. It's hit or miss. And outside of the small patch of the paper that has been roped off for opinion, the chances of coming upon something that might qualify as wisdom are not great. Most reporters have spent too

The extra value news outlets must add is analysis: incisive attempts to divine the significance of events. Insights, not just information.

long pursuing and writing "just the facts" to move easily into drawing conclusions based on facts. Their editors have spent too long resisting the encroachment of anything that is not carefully sourced, that might be perceived as less than objective, to easily welcome such analyses now.

So you sometimes get, under a "news analysis" slug or not, pieces that construct their insights out of the unobjectionably obvious — proclaiming that "some" have "voiced concerns," that "developments" may have "profound ramifications," but "on the other hand" "it is too soon to tell." And you find situations as odd as this: In a column in June 2006, David Brooks of *The New York Times* introduced his "War Council" — the "twenty or thirty people" who, because of the soundness of their "judgments" and "analysis," he turns to for wisdom about Iraq. One of those people works at Brooks's own paper: the "übercorrespondent" — currently Baghdad bureau chief — John F. Burns. Brooks included two quotes from Burns about Iraq in his column, including: "I'd have to say the odds are against success, but they are better now than they were three months ago, that's for sure." However, neither of those quotes was taken from the newspaper that employs Burns, where he ventures beyond the facts only rarely and very cautiously. Instead they were comments Burns made on the PBS program *Charlie Rose*.

"We would be of little value in our television appearances," Burns acknowledges, "if we offered no more than a bare-bones recitation of events, without any attempt to place them in a wider context, and to analyze what they mean." But shouldn't the same standard of "value" apply to Burns's appearances in his newspaper? He denies that *Times* reporters "are

muzzled in conveying the full range of our experience and impressions" under the proper rubrics in the paper. Nonetheless, the "impressions" from this *Times* correspondent that most interested a *Times* columnist had not originally appeared in the *Times* itself.

The Wall Street Journal got a taste of this the-best-stuff-doesn't-make-the-paper problem two years ago when an e-mail found its way onto the Web from one of its reporters in Iraq, Farnaz Fassihi. It proved not only more controversial but arguably more interesting than the stories Fassihi had been filing from that country. For in this e-mail, intended to be private, Fassihi wrote in the first person and she noted what things looked like to her: "For those of us on the ground," she said, "it's hard to imagine what if anything could salvage [Iraq] from its violent downward spiral."

Outside the strictures of mainstream journalism, Fassihi, in other words, did not have to attempt the magic trick American reporters have been attempting for a hundred years now: making themselves and their conclusions disappear.

The switch to a new product line is moving forward at a pretty good pace on the pages of at least two newspapers — one large and foreign, one small and local.

The *Independent* is a serious English national daily in a market with three other serious national dailies. So the *Independent*, looking for an edge, has begun devoting most of its front page, weeklylike, to a single story — a story covered with considerable perspective and depth, a story in which the paper is not shy about exhibiting a point of view. The *Independent* weighed in recently, for example, on the debate on global warming with this headline, and a picture of a large wave, dominating its front page: TSUNAMI HITS BRITAIN: 5 NOVEMBER 2060.

Simon Kelner, the paper's editor in chief, explains that his understanding of the situation of the daily newspaper "crystallized" during coverage in England of the American presidential election in 2004. The *Independent* reported and interpreted the results along with the other papers. "It was a really expensive, exhaustive exercise for us all," Kelner recalls. Yet the next morning newsstand circulation actually fell. For up-to-the-minute results people had turned instead to the radio, television, and the Internet. However, he explains, "The next day *The Independent* published twenty-one pages of analysis and interpretation of the election — and we put on fifteen percent in sales."

Kelner got the message. "The idea that a newspaper is going to be peoples' first port of call to find out what's going on in the world is simply no longer valid. So you have to add another layer: analysis, interpretation, point of view." Kelner now dubs his daily a "viewpaper."


Compare the *Independent's* response to a visit by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the Middle East with that of *The Washington Post*. The *Post* reported on a joint press conference she held with the Palestinian Authority's president, Mahmoud Abbas, on page A26 under this headline: RICE CITES CONCERN FOR PALESTINIANS, BUT LOW EXPECTATIONS MARK VISIT. The *Independent*, that same morning, emblazoned this headline on its front page: THE ROAD MAP TO NOWHERE: FOUR YEARS AFTER GEORGE BUSH UNVEILED HIS MIDDLE EAST PLAN, CONDOLEEZZA RICE ARRIVED TO FIND PEACE AS FAR AWAY AS EVER.

It is not that shocking, by European standards, that *The Independent* has been saying what it thinks; what is fresh and vital is the magazine-like boldness and focus (think *The Economist*) with which it is saying it. Beneath the ROAD MAP TO NOWHERE headline on its front page, the *Independent* displayed a map of Jerusalem. Around the map were arranged five short items — each divided into THE PROMISE (headlined in red) and WHAT HAPPENED — in which the paper compared what the Bush administration had claimed for its “road map for peace” with the little, nothing, or worse (the Lebanon war was mentioned), it has achieved. Inside the paper, an article combined the history of the Bush Middle East plan with a report on Secretary Rice's current, seemingly futile visit to the region. Such a mix of graphic, list, and article — of news event, wider focus, and point of view — is now typical for the *Independent*.

Producing such a paper certainly makes for an interesting newsroom. “Our competitors each select the best news story of the day,” notes John Mullin, the *Independent's* executive editor for news. “What we try to do is something much more holistic. We try to capture the entire feel of something. It makes life much more — some would say difficult, some would say rewarding.” Mullin adds that the

effort to present a big chunk of news with a coherent viewpoint can be particularly “challenging” for journalists who are “used to thinking in the time-honored fashion: who, what, when and where.”

Nowhere in the world has that fashion been as honored, and for such a long time, as it has been in the United States. Mainstream journalists in America today live in fear of the charge of bias. To achieve more vigorous analysis, they may have to get over that fear. After all, opinions — from “these are the times that try men's souls” to FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD — have, historically, managed to hold their own with facts as ways of understanding the world. And it's not as if there aren't things besides the effort to



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be balanced for which journalists might stand. Old-fashioned reason might, for example, do, too.

Journalists also might stand for honesty. Sure, the analytic journalist can prove wrong: Burns, on *Charlie Rose*, had one take on the situation in Iraq; in her e-mail Fassihi, writing at a different time, had another. But there is something to be said for being openly right or wrong rather than hiding an assessment behind the carefully choreographed quotes of various named and unnamed sources.

No one is suggesting that reporters pontificate, spout, hazard a guess, or "tell" when it is indeed "too soon to tell." No one is suggesting that they indulge in unsupported, shoot-from-the-hip tirades. "It's not like talk radio," explains one of the champions of analytic journalism, Mike Levine, executive editor of the *Times Herald-Record* in Middletown, New York. But it's not traditional American journalism either. Levine, a former columnist, had noticed that the analyses reporters unburdened themselves of in conversations in the newsroom were often much more interesting than what ended up in the paper. Some of that conversation is mere loose talk and speculation, of course. Yet "walk into any newsroom in America," Levine says, "turn the reporters upside down, and a hundred stories will come falling out. They know so much about the communities they cover, but they don't get it in the newspaper."

When he took over the *Times Herald-Record* in 1999, Levine was determined to change that. "We simply asked reporters to give the readers the benefit of their intelligent analysis," he explains. This means paying less attention to the mere fact that a hospital administrator resigned in nearby Sullivan County. It may even mean leaving the account of the resignation to the paper's Web site. It definitely means more attention, in the paper, to what that resignation might signify.

"We're not the infantry anymore," Levine explains. "We don't just go out to board meetings and take dictation. That's not really much of a contribution to the community. What are needed are journalists who can connect the dots." Levine, in other words, is not afraid of letting his reporters — after they've done the reporting, when they know as much about a subject as most of their sources — find meaning in the dots.

Accomplishing this at a newspaper that may not be at the top of the hiring ladder has required, in Levine's words, relying on "some experienced people devoted to community journalism"; it has required finding and hiring some young reporters who are "curious" enough not to "shut down inquiry" and surrender to what Levine calls "a stale, petrified 'objectivity.'" But Levine adds, "not every reporter on staff does this kind of reporting. We're evolving into it."

Here is an example of what happens when journalists do Levine's kind of reporting, from a multi-part *Times Herald-Record* series by the reporters Tim Logan and John Doherty, on a renaissance in the city of Newburgh:

The city is shaking off three decades of inertia. It's an exciting time. The real-estate market is hot. City politics are more harmonious. And there are plans galore. Plans for a community college on lower Broadway, plans for the long-empty stretch of land on Water Street, a master plan under way for the city as a whole.

But there's no plan for the city's poor . . . If this city is truly going to rebuild, if it will ever fill the void at its heart, if it can transform itself from a drain on the rest of Orange County into the thriving hub the county desperately needs, Newburgh can no longer ignore its poverty.

Note: That's not, "Some observers suggest Newburgh can no longer ignore its poverty." Nor is that an editorial or a column. The point is being made in news pages, at a small, local newspaper, by journalists — based on what they have learned on their beats (the *Times Herald-Record* employs a traditional, geography-based beat structure), and based on their own reasoned and informed appraisal of the situation.

Burned-out reporters can be forgiven for dreaming that the coming of this analyzing and appraising will lead to a life of leisurely speculation. But, alas, more industrious reporting, not less, will be required. You'd better know an awful lot about plans for rebuilding Newburgh before you contemplate criticizing those plans. Getting at the meaning of events will demand looking beyond press conferences, escaping the pack, tracking down more knowledgeable sources, spending more time with those who have been affected, even seeking out those whom Levine of the *Times Herald-Record* calls "the invisible people — people who are not at board meetings who may not even show up at the voting booth." When Levine took over, his paper began a "sourcing project," designed to force reporters to avoid "going to the same three or four sources [for] every story." More and more diverse sources, the theory goes, should improve story ideas and stories, and help reporters know more when they say what they know.

Strategies developed at the *Times Herald-Record* might be of use at larger papers, too. As a source of timely and important analysis, our journalistic heavyweights are simply not — on a day-to-day, story-to-story basis — reliable. We will know that they have grasped their role in this staler-than-your-muffin news world only when they realize that being fast with the analysis is as important today as being fast with the news has been for the last hundred years.

For that to happen, our major news organizations — we need to begin thinking of them as "news-

analysis organizations" — will have to develop a stable of knowledgeable analysts whom they can assign each day to the major stories — as they currently assign reporters. Some of these "wisdom journalists" might be obtained through raids on think tanks and weeklies. Smaller papers, less able to filch an expert on urban issues from the Brookings Institution, might regularly borrow some analytic talent from the less jargon-infested corners of local universities. But daily news-analysis organizations must also develop their own career path for analysts.

Working your way up through the metro desk, the Washington bureau, and a few overseas beats certainly has its value, but it does not necessarily qualify you for untangling the underlying causes of fundamentalist Islamic terrorism. Some extensive university training might. News-analysis organizations will have no more room for the sort of scholars who never leave the library or their laptops than they'll have room for the sort who stuff sixty words, two of them unfamiliar, into a sentence. "I have a degree in East-Asian studies," Susan Chira, foreign editor of *The New York Times*, states. "But when I went to Asia myself and lived there, I found out a lot of things my teachers didn't know." We will continue — in journalism, not academic journals — to need theory to be tested and illuminated by experience, including on-the-street, eyes-open, with-the-victims experience.

But an ability to go and get is simply no longer sufficient. The best journalistic organizations are going to be selling the best thinking on current events — and that often is furthered by deep, directed study.

The old saying is that reporters are only as good as their sources. We will require many more journalists who, when occasion demands, are better than their sources, journalists who are impeccably *informed*. Let's call this one of the five I's — a guide to what journalists need to be, now that at least four of the old five W's are more widely and easily available. *Intelligent* would be another, along with *interesting* and a holdover from the previous ethos: *industrious*. But the crucial quality is probably *insightful*.

It is significant how many of the most respected names in the history of journalism — from Joseph Addison to Dorothy Thompson and Tom Wolfe, from Charles Dickens to Ernie Pyle and I.F. Stone — were, indeed, known for stories that were exhaustively reported, marvelously written, and often startlingly insightful. The disruptions caused by the new news technologies will prove a blessing if they allow journalists to stop romanticizing the mere gathering and organization of facts and once again aspire to those qualities. ■

Mitchell Stephens, a professor of journalism at New York University, is the author of A History of News.



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for those two
reporters from
The Post, I fear
the Republic
might have
been lost."**

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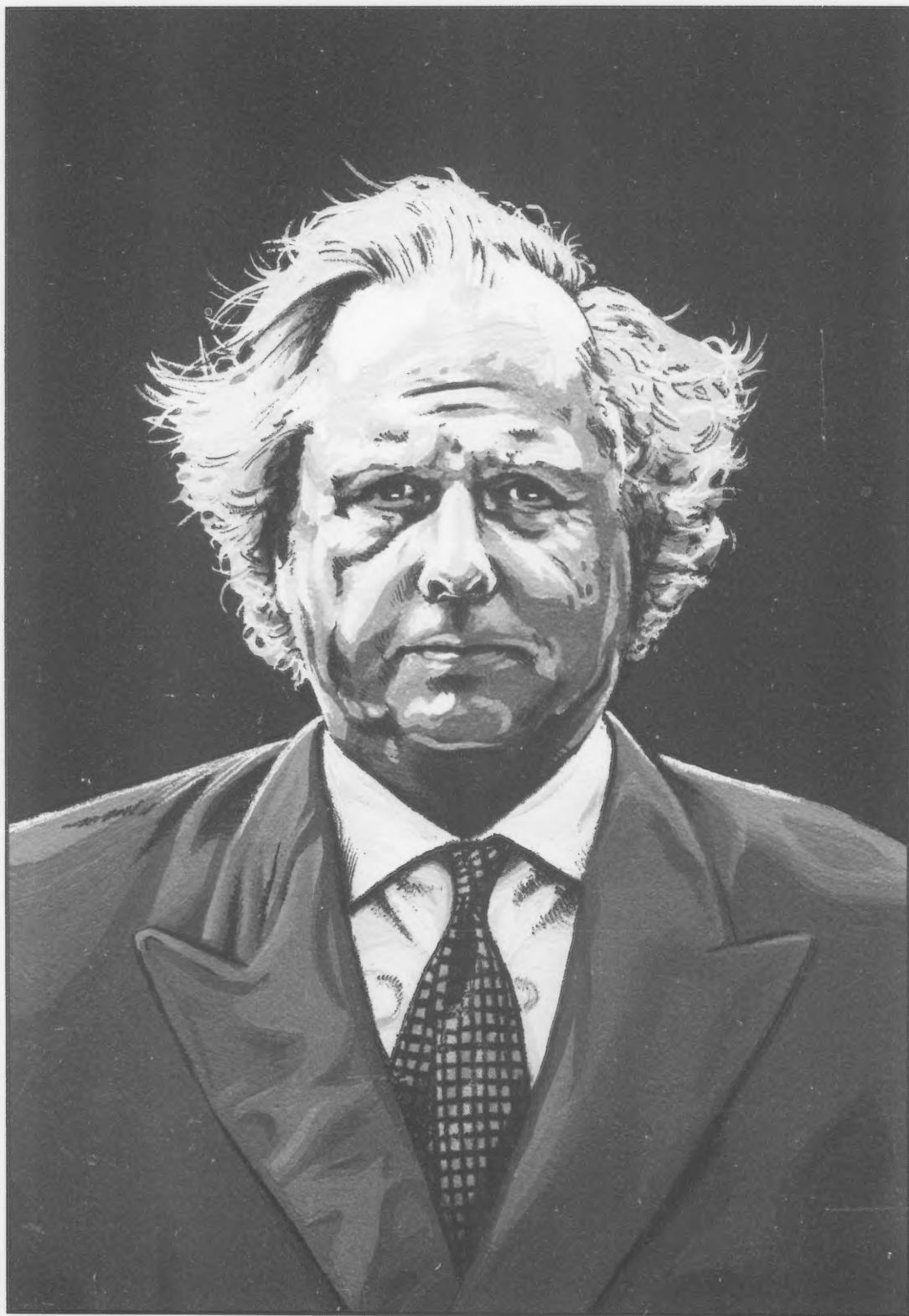
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*Graydon Carter's newfound political outrage
has fueled a resurgence in Vanity Fair's
serious long-form journalism.
But how far can he push
the signature high-low mix
of this Condé Nast cash cow?*

VANITY FIRE

BY BREE NORDENSON

David Hirschman's question for a 2004 Media Bistro article was the same one reporters had been asking Graydon Carter for more than a year: "Do you plan to keep *Vanity Fair* more political?" Hirschman was referring to the magazine generally and to Carter's ferocious editor's letters in particular, which, since 2003, had become an outlet for his disgust with the Bush administration. Carter's reply was defensive. "*Vanity Fair's* always covered politics quite heavily," he said. "I think that my own participation has probably run its course. I've said everything I want to say."

He had not, however. Two and half years have passed and Carter shows no sign of quieting his po-

litical voice. *Vanity Fair* readers can now expect to open their magazine each month and find an editor's letter that, instead of introducing an article — though that occasionally happens — or extolling the virtues of the current issue, will attack the current administration. Carter's foray into political commentary began with his May 2003 letter, which went to press on the eve of the Iraq war. In it, Carter acknowledged the strangeness of editing a glossy and, at least superficially, celebrity-obsessed magazine that also publishes serious, long-form journalism: "I'm in the curious position of being in Los Angeles preparing *Vanity Fair's* annual Oscar party . . . and at the same time organizing our coverage of the

conflict," he wrote. In the space of half a page, Carter went on to criticize the president's complacency ("I see none of the worry lines that should be etched in the face of a man taking the greatest military power ever assembled to war"), his decision to declare war on "a country that has not attacked us," and what he saw as the careless economic and diplomatic policies of the administration.

Carter's political letters continued in the next issue, and the one after that, and on and on, surprising not only some readers but also several of his longtime friends. After all, Carter had never affiliated himself with a political party, and, before 2004, had never even voted. "I never thought of

Around the turn of the new century *Vanity Fair* seemed to lose its delicate balance, tilting too far toward the celebrity half of its personality.

him as someone who'd get onto a political soapbox that way and I was happy to see it," says George Kalogerakis, who worked under Carter for many years at *Spy* and later at *The New York Observer* and *Vanity Fair*. "I thought it was one of those things that, in the old fashioned way, he would play close to the vest." But instead, says Kalogerakis, now a deputy op-ed editor at *The New York Times*, "he was very much saying what he thought."

Carter's political passion has unquestionably benefited *Vanity Fair*. It has deepened his commitment to serious journalism and rescued the magazine from a fallow period around the millennium. He recently embarked on a hiring spree, snatching up five high-profile editors and writers in the span of a year. He's expanded the front section of columns, a mix of commentary and reported articles that now tend to address political issues, and premiered an environmental edition. Even as he stays with *Vanity Fair's* strange but time-tested formula, Carter is adjusting it, stretching its limits.

Vanity Fair has never been an easy magazine to define. Jack Shafer, the media critic for *Slate*, describes it as the "the wicked offspring of a tryst between *Esquire* and *Vogue*" with "the incredibly high production values of *Vogue* and the wraparound glossy advertising package and the serious reporting that *Esquire* had" during the days of Harold Hayes. Resurrected in 1983 by Si Newhouse, the billionaire owner of Advance Publications, it was conceived as a general-interest magazine covering literature, the arts, politics,

and popular culture. It was initially modeled after *The New Yorker* and an earlier Jazz Age *Vanity Fair* started by Condé Nast in 1914, which published a slew of famous modernist writers as well as the work of Picasso and Matisse, but eventually died in 1936. Newhouse's new version floundered under its first two editors, Richard Locke and Leo Lerman, but gained traction under Tina Brown, the former editor of *The Tatler*, the irreverent British society magazine that Newhouse bought in 1982. In her eight years as editor at *Vanity Fair*, Brown made it a success by blending high and low culture — coverage of scandal, celebrity, high society, politics, and international affairs. When Carter replaced Brown in 1992, he inherited a healthy magazine in terms of buzz, circulation, and advertising. After two shaky years, during which the magazine was mockingly called *Vanishing Flair*, Carter began to make the magazine his own, refining Brown's blueprint. In 1994, he established the now famous *Vanity Fair* Oscar party and the Hollywood Issue, which according to Steve Cohn, editor of *Media Industry Newsletter*, "put Carter on the map."

But around the turn of the new century *Vanity Fair* seemed to lose its delicate balance, tilting too far toward the celebrity half of its personality. "I think at that time there was a move away from substance," said Alex Shoumatoff, a contributing editor from 1995 until 2001. "It was more sort of fluffy celebrity stuff." In 1999, Shoumatoff had been working on a series of articles on the environment in time for the 2000 presidential race, but they never made it into the magazine. He left to start his own Web site. There, in a 2001 explanatory post, he described his disappointment with the state of magazine journalism: "The current zeitgeist is anti-environmental, anti-intellectual, parochial, and dumbed down . . . in issue after issue there was nothing there, nothing to read or think about, only articles on the latest Hollywood scandal or palm-sized organizer." Indeed, in 2000, coverage of celebrities, Hollywood, and high society dominated the pages of *Vanity Fair*. The cover of the January issue, along with the usual movie star (this time a demure Cameron Diaz), featured headlines like "The Messiest Rockefeller Divorce Ever," "New York's Hottest New Restaurant," and "High-Tech IPO Madness." But political and international reporting didn't disappear completely. That year there were profiles of Terry McAuliffe and Tony Blair, two articles on the civil unrest in Sierra Leone, and Gail Sheehy's searing character study of the presidential hopeful George W. Bush. But in general, Carter's major accomplishments in 2000 were, journalistically speaking, lightweight. He premiered the Music Issue, which confirmed the magazine's trend toward glossy photo portfolios, popcult coverage, and a desire to recruit advertising. ("O.K., so we've done our annual Hollywood Issue for the past seven years," he wrote in his editor's letter. "And now we're trying to do the

same thing for music.") Carter also changed the magazine's typeface, redesigned Vanities, a department dedicated to style, celebrity, and humor, and introduced Fanfair, a section devoted to short takes on art and culture. That same year, he published *Vanity Fair's Hollywood*, an enormous photography-laden coffee-table book.

Vanity Fair's journalistic slump coincided with Carter's involvement in several Hollywood projects and a divorce from his wife of eighteen years, Cynthia Williamson. The rumors in the industry were that Carter had grown bored at the magazine. He began using the powerful connections of his editorship to gain entry into Hollywood. In the late nineties, he suggested to Brian Grazer, a Hollywood producer, that Sylvia Nasar's book, *A Beautiful Mind* (which had been excerpted in *Vanity Fair*), be adapted into a movie. In 2004, the press discovered that Carter had received a \$100,000 consultant fee for the suggestion, which, given *Vanity Fair's* coverage of Hollywood and its annual New Establishment list of power players, was considered unkosher; Grazer and Ron Howard, the producers of *A Beautiful Mind*, have been included on the New Establishment list in some capacity every year since 2001. According to Ann Louise Bardach, a former *Vanity Fair* writer who is the director of The Media Project at PEN USA/University of California, Santa Barbara, Carter "is a really solid committed

journalist." But, she adds, "He also enjoys being a Hollywood player. And those can be conflicting interests when it comes to the movie business."

In 2000, Carter began working on his own film project as the producer of *The Kid Stays in the Picture*, a biopic about the producer Robert Evans. USA films, which was then headed by Carter's close friend and New Establishment list regular Barry Diller, financed the film. According to two former writers, *Vanity Fair* began to cover Hollywood less often and less critically as Carter became more involved in his Hollywood side projects. In early 2000, Carter even considered leaving *Vanity Fair* to become a creative consultant for pop.com, the now-defunct Internet venture of Dreamworks and Imagine Entertainment (run by Grazer and Howard).

Carter was not, it seems, unaware of the decline of serious, long-form journalism in his magazine. He refused to be interviewed for this piece (and asked his staff and his contributing writers not to cooperate), but in a July 2000 editor's letter in which he congratulated himself and *Vanity Fair* on winning two national magazine awards for reporting and photography, he wrote somewhat guiltily, "I sometimes worry that our coverage of Hollywood and all its appendages — the New Establishment, the Oscar Party, the Hollywood Issue, the cover stories, and so forth — tends to overshadow the heart of the magazine, which is storytelling on a grand scale."

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The events of September 11 led Carter to step up his magazine's national and international coverage. For the November 2001 edition, Carter actually separated *Vanity Fair's* two halves and released two magazines, the regular Music Issue and a smaller issue entitled "One Week in September," which contained, among other things, a photo portfolio of New York City firefighters and an essay by David Halberstam. Carter made a forced attempt to connect the discordant magazines in his editor's letter that month, which ran in the music edition. *Vanity Fair's* strange mix of celebrity and seriousness was reunited in the December issue, which featured a bare-chested Brad Pitt on the cover, reported articles about Flight 93, Osama bin Laden, and the bombing of Afghanistan.

Still, *Vanity Fair's* renewed dedication to political reporting got off to a rocky start. Like most media outlets in 2001 and 2002, the magazine was largely uncritical in its coverage and portrayal of the Bush administration. The February 2002 cover featured an Annie Leibowitz photograph of Bush, Cheney, Powell, Rumsfeld, Rice, Tenet, and Card as the heroic leaders of the war on terror. The magazine hit its nadir when it ran three embarrassingly credulous pieces based on interviews with Iraqi defectors. Those articles, written by David Rose and published in 2002 and 2003, linked 9/11 and Iraq, asserted that Saddam Hussein was manufacturing weapons of mass destruction, and presented Ahmad Chalabi as an Iraqi hero. Frighteningly (as *The Village Voice* pointed out in 2005), Rose's article on the presence of WMD in Iraq was cited as support for the rationale for war laid out in a 2002 National Intelligence Estimate. "We were all kind of prepared to be just as mindlessly admiring of White House power as we were in the Clinton years but very soon it turned out obviously that that was misplaced," said one current *Vanity Fair* writer, who asked to remain anonymous.

Vanity Fair's dedication to serious journalism hit a turning point in the middle of 2003 at around the same time that Carter first began criticizing the administration and the war in his editor's letters. In a 2003 *Financial Times* article Carter told the interviewer that he considered foreign reporting the "meat of the magazine . . . I love that more than anything." By 2004, *Vanity Fair's* political coverage was in full swing, with the publication of three 20,000-word special reports. The articles, reported by two teams of *Vanity Fair* contributing editors, were exhaustive reconstructions of the events leading up to the war in Iraq, the 2000 election debacle in Florida, and the September 11 attacks. In the editor's letter that accompanied the investigative article on the path to war, Carter admitted that *Vanity Fair* had been deceived by Chalabi, but went on to note "that unlike the White House and the Pentagon . . . *Vanity Fair* did not use Chalabi's information to take the American

people into an unwanted and unnecessary invasion of Iraq." And in a partisan conclusion in this longer than usual dispatch, Carter wrote, "How did George W. Bush get us into this war without end in the first place? How did he, in just a few short years, tarnish America's great and good name, which stood for liberty and leadership . . . [F]or solutions to both, be sure to vote on November 2." Even in the March 2004 issue, the blatantly commercial Hollywood edition, Carter used his editor's letter to publish a three-page list of the names, ages, and home towns of the American soldiers who had died in Iraq.

In 2005, *Vanity Fair* broke the Deep Throat story and ran notable coverage of Hurricane Katrina with another essay by David Halberstam and a photo portfolio of the hurricane's victims and heroes in New Orleans. In general, though, the magazine's focus on national and international affairs dropped off a bit. But that was only temporary, as Carter was in the midst of making some significant additions to his stable of journalists. In December 2005, Todd Purdum, a star reporter for the Washington bureau of *The New York Times*, announced he was leaving the newspaper to become *Vanity Fair's* first national editor. Several months later, William Langewiesche, an award-winning writer for *The Atlantic Monthly*, and Cullen Murphy, the *Atlantic's* managing editor for twenty years, announced they were joining *Vanity Fair* as the international correspondent (a new title) and editor-at-large, respectively. The whirlwind of hires continued when, in August 2006, Donald Barlett and James Steele, the Pulitzer-prize-winning investigative team of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Time*, signed a multiyear contract to contribute two articles to *Vanity Fair* annually.

Barlett and Steele, who had been let go from *Time* that spring, met Carter and Murphy this summer and the four men hit it off instantly. "The more we talked, I think the more the four of us realized we were all on exactly the same page on a lot of issues," Steele says. "There are going to be so many stories on the national level, everything from corruption to political influence-peddling in Washington to the government askew." The conversation went so well that Murphy called Steele's cell phone that night and said, "We really, really want to work this out." They signed the contract shortly thereafter. Barlett and Steele are already at work on two investigative articles to be edited by Murphy, with the first piece slated for publication in early 2007.

The effect that these hires will have on the content of the magazine is only just emerging. In his tenure as national affairs editor, Purdum, who refused to speak with *CJR*, has written three 9,000-word political profiles of Dick Cheney, the Bushes, and Karl Rove. Langewiesche's first piece, a short but critical commentary on the war, which was based on an e-mail he sent to Murphy from Iraq, was published in September 2006. That same

month, Carter reached a new level of ire in his editor's letter: "And on this, the fifth anniversary of 9/11, perhaps it's time to review the administration's assertion that that was the day the world changed. It really wasn't; 9/12 was. That was the day the neocons in the White House began using this devastating attack on American soil to further their own dreams of taking over Iraq . . . That was the day the administration began plotting to remove a dictator over there and to create one here."

This was evidently not the same man who, several years earlier in an effort to justify his Hollywood ties, had explained away his satiric days at *Spy* as the result of youthful indignation: "I think that it was

him as someone who "always thinks whatever he is doing at the moment is the greatest, most fantastic thing." According to Andersen, Carter's anger at the Bush administration comes from "the same slice of his brain" responsible for all his passions. "When he decides something he goes for it," says Andersen. "He doesn't do things in halfway measures." I asked Andersen if he read Carter's letters and he responded in his characteristically emphatic manner: "I do. I love 'em. I love 'em . . . I love reading them because they're so clearly him. The fact that the editor of this big magazine is gratuitously doing this rather than saying, 'and we have a wonderful piece this month by this wonderful writer.' . . . The fact that he has actually busted out of that form and does this amusing rant, or whatever, is fantastic . . . It's confidence. It's like, fuck it, I'm gonna do what I want."

Sam Tanenhaus, the editor of *The New York Times Book Review* and a former writer for *Vanity Fair*, agrees. "If you're putting out a magazine and you can't state your point of view, something's wrong," he said. "It's really heartening to see at a time when magazines are struggling a little bit and are so cautious that Graydon is not."

In the first half of 2006, *Vanity Fair* saw steady increases in circulation, with a particularly impressive 17 percent jump in newsstand sales. Ad pages slipped by 5.6 percent in the first eight months of the year, but Carter didn't suffer as a result. Si Newhouse replaced *Vanity Fair*'s publisher in August, a move that Scott Donaton, the editor of *Advertising Age*, says is a clear indication that Newhouse plans to keep Carter around for a while. "A lot of what Condé Nast does is symbolic as well as real," Donaton explains. "I think they make statements with a lot of the personnel moves they do make and this one would seem to be a statement that . . . *Vanity Fair* is very much [Carter's] domain." And certainly now that Carter has become politically outspoken, he is unlikely to leave a position many observers say has significant influence in Washington.

But it remains to be seen whether *Vanity Fair*'s shift toward serious journalism is permanent. Will his new recruits amount to more than, as David Carr, *The New York Times* media critic, asks, "journalistic jewelry"? Ann Louise Bardach is somewhat skeptical, especially after flipping through the October issue, which contained a twenty-two-page photographic portfolio and fawning profile of Tom Cruise, Katie Holmes, and their new baby. "I think he does publish some really terrific stories," she told me. "He has good taste, but when he's worried about newsstands, like everyone else, he can panic. And that's when you get twenty-two pages of photographs of a boring little baby." When I asked Steele how he felt about his investigative pieces running alongside a celebrity profile or squeezed between pages of luxury advertising, he said, "Well, those glossy ads do pay the freight." As Jack Shafer

'No one buys *Vanity Fair* for its Haditha stories. If I thought you could get a million readers based on Haditha stories I would try to persuade *Time* to start that magazine.'

—Jim Kelly, managing editor of *Time Inc.*

good to be young and angry at *Spy* back then," Carter told *The New York Times* in 2002. "But if at 52 you're still angry, you don't need a magazine, you need therapy." Two years later, Carter had changed his tune, telling *The Guardian* that he hadn't felt the same "sense of outrage" since he was in his thirties.

Jim Kelly, the managing editor of *Time Inc.* and a longtime friend of Carter's — the two met as reporters for *Time* magazine in 1978 — says Carter has always had strong political opinions, but had never before voiced them publicly. "I vividly remember in January 1991, dinner with Graydon and Cynthia at Le Madri restaurant," Kelly says. "The gulf war hadn't started yet but the grumblings were there . . . and Graydon was lethal in his criticism of President Bush. He said it was all about oil and it was a mistake. And here I am — I'm the world editor of *Time* magazine — and I start arguing all the complexities, and somewhere in the middle of the entree I decided, you know what? I think I'm going to stop arguing with Graydon because he was just — he had a very strong, strong, strong point of view."

When Kelly first met Carter he was instantly struck by "his extraordinarily appealing enthusiasm," which, he says, still defines Carter today. "He can be enthusiastic about a meal. He can be enthusiastic about his family. He can be enthusiastic about a lamp that he saw in a window," says Kelly. Kurt Andersen, who cofounded *Spy* with Carter and now hosts the public radio show *Studio 360*, describes

points out, "There's practically no magazine or newspaper that does not trade in celebrity coverage. Rather than downplaying its celebrity coverage, which you'll find in the *Times Magazine*, and you'll find in *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair* puts a great big bow on its celebrity coverage and puts it on the cover. So there's kind of a double standard when people criticize the magazine."

As far as Shafer's concerned, readers shouldn't be bothered by *Vanity Fair*'s celebrity coverage because they don't have to read it. Though many do. In November, the magazine ran Langewiesche's elegant 14,000-word piece on the massacre of Iraqi civilians in Haditha and the pressures and nuances of warfare. "It's a piece that I can't imagine any magazine wouldn't be proud to run," Jim Kelly told me. But he cautioned that "no one buys *Vanity Fair* for their Haditha coverage . . . If I thought you could get a monthly magazine with a million readers based on Haditha stories I would try and persuade Time Inc. to start up that magazine." In 2004, Carter acknowledged the dilemma when he publicly lamented the fact that he had to rely on celebrity covers to sell hundreds of thousands of magazines at the newsstand. "Unfortunately," he told *The (London) Observer Magazine*, "attractive people sell better than unattractive people."

Indeed, *Vanity Fair*, celebrities and all, is what those in the industry refer to as a "franchise" publication; in other words, it is crucial to maintaining Condé Nast's bottom line. Thus, Carter's emphasis on politics must fit within the bounds of the magazine's existing formula, though, as Andersen points out, *Vanity Fair*'s success gives it an "orbital velocity" that would be difficult to disrupt. The premiere of the Green Issue in May, for example, was a significant departure from the typical *Vanity Fair* special issue — it contained lengthy articles on topics such as the politics of global warming and mountaintop mining in Appalachia and a photographic portfolio of environmental leaders (not all of whom were celebrities); it also lacked the huge number of advertising pages that thicken the annual Hollywood and Music issues. Still, its newsstand sales were on par with many other issues that year, perhaps because Carter relied on celebrities to sell the magazine. As Jim Kelly observed, "*Time* puts a polar bear on our cover about climate change. They put Julia Roberts and George Clooney and Al Gore and Robert F. Kennedy Junior. I think you could argue that those four people capture very well what the mix is in the magazine."

Vanity Fair's mix works, according to some, because Carter has an intuitive sense of what readers want. "He's got, like Gatsby, that delicate seismography," says Tanenhaus. "He knows what's going on in the culture so if he feels a shift in the culture and where he thinks there's work to be done, he'll do

that." Shoumatoff, who has witnessed the evolution of both *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair* over the years, says, "The best magazines are slightly ahead of the zeitgeist. They not only catch a cresting wave of cultural change, a shift in public perception, they help make it happen. No one does this better than *Vanity Fair*." For Shoumatoff, nothing better confirms Carter's mastery of the zeitgeist than the outcome of the midterm elections. And with the coming presidential election, which occurs in the same year as the magazine's twenty-fifth anniversary, *Vanity Fair*'s political coverage (and Carter's letters) will undoubtedly continue. In his editor's letter in July, Carter promised readers that he would produce another Green Issue, citing the findings of a Pentagon report that "said abrupt climate change could be a serious threat to national security." His political passion combined with Newhouse's support mean Carter will be pushing the high limit of *Vanity Fair*'s signature high-low mix. As Andersen says, Carter could just "put his feet up and say, 'Okay I've got the formula, we're selling a jillion copies, we're making a ton of money. This is it.'" Instead, he has exploited his newest enthusiasm (and one that reflects the cultural zeitgeist) — politics — to recast *Vanity Fair* as a medium dedicated to serious national and international issues.

In early November, Carter, Kurt Andersen, and George Kalogerakis gathered onstage for a panel discussion about *Spy* magazine moderated by David Carr. Slouching slightly in a heavy, oak chair, Carter sat stage right dressed in a navy, double-breasted suit jacket and casual brown pants. His graying hair was styled in its signature dramatic flip. Throughout the evening, he exuded a mix of bemusement and indifference, speaking often but in a careful, self-assured manner. Toward the end of the discussion, Carr turned to Carter and declared, "In the [*Spy*] book, Graydon, you're the mercurial young man moving from thing to thing and yet now you seem to have found a job where you're not tiltin' towards the next thing, where you've found a way to reinvent where you are, maybe making movies while you do it, maybe bringin' in new people. Is that just the fact that you've grown up or that you've finally found a megaphone that sort of suits you?" Carter looked at Carr blankly as he spoke and stuttered for a minute before settling on an answer. "*Vanity Fair* is whatever you want to make it and I've made it into something that I feel comfortable with and it's a job that I absolutely adore and has great influence," he said, in his faint Anglo-Canadian accent, then added with a hint of triumph in his voice, "You know, I got more war reporters than society reporters at the magazine now." ■

Bree Nordenson is an assistant editor at CJR.

IDEAS & REVIEWS

ESSAY



AP WIDE WORLD

Egyptian tanks roll triumphantly back into Port Said after British and French forces evacuated, December 23, 1956.

Official Secrets

On treason and the press, from Suez to the war on terror

BY BRUCE PAGE

When, in mid-2006, a *Wall Street Journal* editorial suggested that *The New York Times's* disclosures about warrant-free National Security Agency surveillance might be treasonous, it cited the constitutional authority Alexander M. Bick-

el. That was something of a zinger, for Bickel was the *Times's* chief counsel in the Pentagon Papers affair. He famously defended that disclosure (of secret — and pessimistic — analyses of the Vietnam War), but later held that government nonetheless has rights to se-

crecy which news media must respect: "Not everything is fit to print." The *Journal* implied that Bickel would have judged the *Times's* coverage of the NSA altogether unfit.

The treason charge gets aired whenever government believes se-

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crecy is needed to secure national interests from disaster: national security, a public good, conflicting with the good of democratic discussion. That tension is assumed in every democracy and particularly in America, where tradition has favored disclosure.

The history, however, includes many instances of news media serving official secrecy by intention, corruption, or neglect, in America and elsewhere. Definitions of national interest vary, to be sure; still, suppression is more readily shown to end in catastrophe than in advantage. *Secrecy: The American Experience* was the last work of Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Reviewing the cold war, he wondered if self-inflicted wounds — enabled by secrecy — perhaps damaged the West more than clandestine Soviet malice ever did.

A strange case in point — an interaction between journalism, secrecy, and national interest — is fifty years old this winter, a case that allows us a historical test. Indeed, anyone testing Bickel's proposition should start with the Suez War of 1956 and its coverage in *The Times* of London — an event with parallels in both the war on terror and the 1930s appeasement drama that precipitated World War II, which President Bush and Prime Minister Blair so often urge us to study.

A condensed history: in 1956, *The Times* was independent and profitable. That October, it acquired comprehensive knowledge of the British government's plans for going to war with Egypt over the Suez Canal. Those plans were secret and, as we shall see, totally fraudulent. But the editor, Sir William Haley, and his foreign editor, Iverach McDonald, published nothing, because Prime Minister Anthony Eden insisted that Britain's survival depended on victory. And success, as usual in frauds, was dependent altogether on secrecy.

Secrecy was kept. Ignominious defeat ensued. And Britain survived.

In many histories, the Suez crisis opens with Egyptian nationalization of the canal on July 26, 1956. But as with the recent invasion of Iraq, an agenda pre-existed. Some months earlier Eden had convinced himself that Gamel Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian president, was organizing a titanic conspiracy to deliver the Middle East to communism. British diplomats (later proven correct) thought this delusional, but Guy Mollet's French Socialists sympathized with Eden. Nasser was behind all *their* Arab troubles, and felling him in Cairo would, they reasoned, paralyze rebellion in distant Algeria. It was theorizing worthy of neocons storming Baghdad to create a Palestinian democracy amenable to Israeli peace terms.

Though the nationalization did indeed dismay Eden, he saw in it a bonanza — a chance to destroy Nasser. Mendacious camouflage was generated — the notion was put forth that Britain desired only international guarantees for canal traffic, while at the same time the cabinet resolved in secret on regime change. Alarming (to Eden), Egypt showed a readiness to negotiate access and compensate Suez shareholders at market prices. Eden concealed or ignored both legal advice that Nasser's actions were legitimate and estimates that establishing a new Cairo regime would demand military resources of unwelcome size.

Eden thought Nasser was just as lethal as Hitler, but discovered to his dismay that Washington disagreed. Consequently, Eden ended up concealing from Britain's chief ally, the U.S. and its president, Dwight Eisenhower, his commitment to a Middle Eastern war. This meant, of course, deceiving the public and any inquisitive news

media. Most inquisitive was *The Guardian*, aware that the U.S. State Department distrusted Eden's intentions. But diligent investigation produced nothing printable.

And then the whole bizarre story was handed on a platter to Iverach McDonald of *The Times*. Understanding this requires some knowledge of what happened to that newspaper and its staff during the 1938 appeasement, which was perhaps the worst professional disgrace imposed on journalists writing in English. There are comparisons that the Bush/Blair lecture about appeasement doesn't draw.

Back in 1938 there was not much sign of Britain's press undermining national interests — interests as defined by Neville Chamberlain's government, which fancied that Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini would become fine international citizens once their territorial ambitions were appeased. Chamberlain's idea of peace required suppressing ample evidence that Europe's dictators were violently dangerous, and the press, with certain honorable exceptions, assisted him, agreeing that resistance to Hitler was unthinkable because he possessed, as *The Times* said, "weapons of mass destruction." In spite of Chamberlain the people took the national interest — the world's interest, one might say — into their own hands, and in September 1939 forced a hallucinating government to face the need for war. Seven months later popular pressure led to Chamberlain's replacement by Winston Churchill.

Though not unique in promoting appeasement, *The Times* was uniquely deep in the Chamberlain government's pocket, and for one young foreign correspondent that made a personal ordeal. Iverach McDonald reported the Munich crisis from Prague, among people his editors were sedulously betraying by pushing the British "national interest" — in Chamberlain's version — requiring Czechoslovakia to concede all Hitler's territorial demands. To that end, *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi* were applied with dismal success.

During the war that followed Hitler's attempted reprise in Poland, McDonald grew close to one of the few Tory leaders who survived the 1930s with a clean name — Anthony Eden, who indeed qualified for admiration. He was a World War I combat veteran and a scholar of Middle Eastern languages; Britain's youngest foreign secretary, he quit in 1938 over Chamberlain's ill-judged intrigues with Mussolini. He was a major figure in Churchill's and Roosevelt's World War II victory and later a skillful ally when America secured

briefings. And on October 18, having tied up most of the plot, Eden saw McDonald at 10 Downing Street and revealed all its chief features. He had been depressed to find that the public did not favor a war of choice over a canal that Egypt was discussing at the United Nations — and keeping carefully open. But now the prime minister was relieved: Britain and France would ride out to check Israeli aggression and re-establish peace. If the fraud held good, it would neutralize much opposition, and even generate enthusiasm. He was forewarning *The Times* so that

conspirator nations to retreat from Egyptian territory before they could get the canal.

Had the story run in the *Times* and the war not occurred, some long-term prospects can be projected with decent confidence:

■ Damage to Britain's standing as a nation of laws would have been minor, not massive; the aborted conspiracy would likely have passed as an aberration.

■ Nasser's stature would have risen — but not to dangerous altitudes.

■ Iraq's pro-British leaders might have stabilized themselves. (As it was, Nuri-es-Said's regime fell in 1958 amid gunfire. Instability, potential or savagely real, has been Iraq's fate ever since.)

■ The USSR certainly would have had to modify its cold-war brutality. On November 4, 1956, its troops moved against the Hungarian uprising. Its style would have been seriously cramped by a united pressure from Western and neutral nations. But America was embroiled in protecting third-world Egypt from

History includes many instances of the press serving official secrecy by intention.

Europe against Soviet military potential. He was a cold warrior, though a temperate one.

That quality evaporated on October 14, 1956, when French emissaries arrived with a proposition mafiosos might have viewed askance. Israel, then a close French ally, was ready to invade Egypt. This was, ostensibly, to be spontaneous action triggered by fears of Egyptian rearmament; actually it would be by arrangement with and aid from France and Britain, who would deal with the ersatz "emergency" of canal nationalization by seizing Suez to "separate the combatants." Incidentally, they would eliminate Nasser.

Improbabilities abounded. A pliant succession in Cairo was assumed — without specific plans. Absurdly, Israel's "spontaneous" invasion had to rely on Anglo-French destruction of Egypt's air force — action the U.S. was somehow to overlook. Then President Eisenhower was expected to accept, via deception, measures that he had rejected in explicit discussion: nothing in his record made that plausible. Still, the scheme had a certain wild purity, a benchmark quality as a test of secrecy and national interest.

Throughout the crisis Eden had given McDonald, now *The Times's* head of foreign affairs, special personal

more fine — if devious — editorial-page rhetoric could be prepared.

Eden was so entranced by his vision of *Finest Hour II* that he assumed his *Times* confidants shared it. But by McDonald's later account the plot struck him as deadlier to Western interests than anything Nasser might concoct. Before asking why the government's secrets stayed nonetheless intact, let's see what their exposure (say in a *Times* story at October 20) would have precipitated:

■ Overwhelming dissent in Britain and in Australia (the one Commonwealth nation whose government shared Eden's Nasser-as-Hitler-redux fixation). Opposition to war, serious enough anyway, would have exploded on proof of fraud — reaching France, possibly Israel, let alone Canada, India, and New Zealand.

■ Decisive countermeasures by the U.S., on which Britain relied for oil and financial support.

■ Cancellation of the air strikes — which required surprise — immobilizing Israel's Sinai expedition.

■ Regime change in Britain: the fall of Eden's government.

In the certain short term, there could have been no war. However, the campaign did open, with the fraud still intact. It collapsed within six days under pressures of a similar but lesser sort — essentially, Eisenhower, once undeceived, forced the



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equally ruthless assault by its own close allies, England and France. The Soviet tanks mowed the partisans down without the slightest inhibition.

There's *nothing* for the plus side of the national-interest ledger. This is, of course, the Moynihan experience applying powerfully to Britain, and scarcely a helpful case for Bickel. Governments may need secrecy. But overdosing is destructive.

Why didn't *The Times* blow the whistle a deluded prime minister pressed to its lips? There is no more remarkable failure in journalistic history. The perfectly informed newspaper was perfectly inactive, when six crisp paragraphs might have averted disaster.

The record is slender but offers useful clues. Sir William Haley wrote no memoirs and never discussed the matter. In his autobiography, *A Man Of The Times* (1976), McDonald was eloquent on fissures the 1956 war cut into British society, and his sense of doom at its approach — then sidled away from responsibility. "Very few people had any preknowledge of the scheme," he wrote, as if he had not. But in writing the paper's official history, *Struggles in War and Peace* (1984), he had to confront appeasement's ethical morass, and found he could not pass silently on to Suez. Though terse, his account shows how the secrecy around Eden spread itself to *The Times* office, circumscribing journalistic action.

McDonald says he and Sir William managed their link with Eden very tightly, and by ill-judgment — he admits — shared little of its product with their colleagues. And as weeks passed they "fell into the way" of keeping Suez out of discussions with those given less confidential access. "Knowledgeable men such as Teddy Hodgkin and Richard Harries . . . felt themselves excluded," he says — but these men were authorities on international politics, and celebrated ones in the discreet way British elites then practiced. McDonald concedes that the Suez analysis should have involved such experts. If so, much lethal fantasy would have evaporated.

As it was, on October 18 McDonald could not discuss his fearsome scoop with anyone — Haley being away on a

U.S. promotional tour. Eden was furiously bent on security (he even tried to run the three-way plan with nothing on paper), and McDonald feared leakage too much to use telephone or telex. He wrote a complete but quite private record — entirely by hand, because all *Times* typescripts were routinely archived.

It seems, however, that McDonald did want the story to break, for he told a Downing Street official as shooting started that he had hoped Haley would go to Eden and "warn him off." But that could only have been done via disclosure, and enough time remained after Haley's return (October 21) for a competent news team to generate an effective account without quoting Eden. Many clues existed — indeed, *The Guardian* was assembling them, though lacking knowledge of the far-fetched scheme that made them comprehensible.

Yet the circle of initiates actually contracted as days passed. Haley had talks with Eden from which McDonald found himself excluded. He suggests that Sir William essentially agreed with his own forecast that "doom" would be the gimcrack conspiracy's outcome. But a letter Haley wrote during the first fighting shows he had conceived a hope of "justification by results." McDonald clearly accepted the decision for silence that the absurd hope implied.

However it was silence, not cheerleading. *The Times* never produced the Churchillian rhetoric Eden wanted, and once U.S. and UN pressure forced a ceasefire (November 6) its editorials turned gloomy. It did give considerable space to denials of collusion by the demoralized conspirators, but on November 20, *The Guardian* produced the first hard proof that it was all a plot. In January, Eden resigned, a sad remnant of a great statesman.

Two distinguished journalists had made themselves into "morons," as Daniel Ellsberg puts things in *Secrets*, his 2002 "memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers." Ellsberg used the word when explaining the long years he spent in top-secret Washington, systematically overstating — as he now believes — prospects of success in Vietnam. He argues that practical mental function declines in proportion to the quantity of secrets acquired via official

clearances. The recipient finds it hard to respect

anybody who doesn't have these clearances . . . you'll be thinking . . . 'What would this man be telling me if he knew what I know?' . . . And that mental exercise is so torturous that after a while you give it up and just stop listening. [In dealing with anyone] who doesn't have these clearances . . . you'll have to lie carefully to him about what you know.

And thus the custodian of secrets becomes

something like a moron . . . incapable of learning from most people in the world, no matter how much experience they may have . . . that may be much greater than yours.

Ellsberg's syndrome afflicted Haley and McDonald classically. And debates on secrecy often assume its sinister glamour and tactical efficacy: certainly it can be put to episodic use in stock markets, used-car trading, or espionage. But its regular product is stupidity. Secret knowledge, said Moynihan,

long before the WMD debacle, is often untested knowledge, and intelligence agencies inevitably are storehouses of things which just ain't so. What, then, is the attraction to governments of secrecy?

Machiavelli is the famous consultant on clandestine arts, and favored apparently by neocons. But his precepts are misleading if separated from his principles — that a state's fortunes rest on the rationality and constancy of its people, wiser than its leaders and the proper judges of its interests. The *Wall Street Journal's* criticism of the *Times's* NSA disclosures might imply a right of secrecy inherent to rulers; Machiavelli, however, emphasizes that rulers are only agents for the people. Agents, he assumes, are apt to appropriate the rights of principals. If Sir Anthony Eden, a truly great man, did so, lesser politicians will offend regularly. And this goes far to explain why journalists who accept official estimates of a nation's interests end up so often wounding it.

Serving Florence unsentimentally as a member of the Ten of War, Machiavelli knew that a city amid enemies cannot distribute totally equal knowledge at every moment. Perfect societies may exclude untruth: in the work of existing ones, secrecy and lies have their place. Alongside his remark that one gross lie will repeatedly deceive individuals who fancy that accepting it offers them sectional advantage, it may seem to endorse mendacity unconfined. But no such advantage exists among the people as a whole — and so corruption may be checked. Machiavelli's real position is that lies and secrecy must be used with strictest moderation: that abuse makes them habit-forming, and for the addict no safe dose exists. ■

Bruce Page worked at the London Evening Standard and the Sunday Times before editing the New Statesman. He is author of The Murdoch Archipelago, and is now preparing a study of the war on terror.

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SECOND READ

BENEVOLENT DREAMER

BEN YAGODA ON ST. CLAIR MCKELWAY, WHO WROTE
WITH LUCIDITY ABOUT HIS OWN MENTAL ILLNESS



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McKelway, standing second from left, at a party to celebrate Frank Case's new book at New York's Algonquin Hotel in 1938. Seated from left, are Fritz Foord, Wolcott Gibbs, Case, and Dorothy Parker. Standing with McKelway are Alan Campbell, Russell Maloney, and James Thurber.

Last summer James Wolcott reviewed *The Complete New Yorker* on DVD for *The New Criterion*. He concluded with a list of "future topics for inquiry." Number one with a bullet point was this: "Why does A.J. Liebling remain a vibrant role model for writers while the superb, prolific St. Clair McKelway has been sorely forgotten?" Liebling's continued popularity is not my

subject here, though I will direct your attention to his description of a New York City boxing cornerman's "satellite, a man who went

We talk of books standing the test of time. SECOND READ is an exploration of that maxim — journalists reflecting on books that shaped their own work, or whose lessons remain relevant.

by the name of Mr. Emmet. Mr. Emmet, a Bostonian, is so called because, as he explains, 'I always hanged in Emmet Street.' He has forgotten his former name, which was polysyllabic." In my opinion, the creator of that last sentence deserves to be a role model for writers as long as there are writers.

To the McKelway part of the question, I say: Why indeed?

McKelway was a North Carolin-

ian with journalism in his bloodlines: his great uncle, whose name he shared, had been editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle*; the family moved to Washington, D.C., and his brother Ben was to become editor of the *Washington Star*. Starting out as an office boy on the *Washington Times-Herald*, McKelway went on to the *New York World*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Bangkok Daily Mail* — relocating to Siam for four years being a characteristically unpredictable McKelway move. He came to *The New Yorker* in 1933, at the age of twenty-eight, just as the magazine was becoming a magnet for the best urban journalists from all the New York dailies. In a span of just a few years, the *New Yorker's* founding editor, Harold Ross, recruited at least one reporter who continues to be a vibrant role model — Joseph Mitchell — and quite a few more who have been sorely forgotten, including Alva Johnston, Joel Sayre, and John McNulty.

McKelway's first *New Yorker* piece was a profile of a New York City policeman, and he speedily established a niche writing about cops and various kinds of crooks under the magazine's rubric "Annals of Crime." He continued in this vein for thirty-six years, eventually collecting his pieces in two books, *True Tales from the Annals of Crime and Rascality* (1951) and *Big Little Man from Brooklyn* (1969), both unjustly out of print. McKelway was drawn not to gangsters, murderers, or thugs but to those he called "rascals" — the embezzler, the counterfeiter of one-dollar bills (this piece was eventually adapted into the 1950 film *Mister 880*), the second-story man, the impostor. Unlike most crime writers of that (and this) day, he didn't judge or — what is harder to avoid — condescend to his subjects. Instead, he presented the facts, with tacit and sometimes explicit sympathy. More generally, McKelway helped cement what became the cornerstone of *New Yorker* fact writing (that was the preferred

term, "journalism" sounding a mite pretentious): an understated, elegant, and witty stylistic stance, buttressed and to some degree created, by massive reporting.

His 1939 Annals of Crime piece "The Innocent Man at Sing Sing," deserves to be included in any anthology of crime reporting, or maybe any anthology of reporting. It starts out this way:

Early in the evening of December 8, 1938, a young man named Philip Caruso went outdoors for the first time in two weeks. He had gone to bed with the gripe on Thanksgiving and had stayed there for twelve days before the

Caruso was as innocent of this crime as Chief Justice Hughes, he was tried, convicted, and sent to Sing Sing to serve a sentence of from ten to twenty years.

McKelway goes on to recount, with the same terrific precision of diction and fact, the chain of events leading to Caruso's conviction and, after he had served ten months, to his exoneration and release. He gives us the overworked police detectives, the highly suggestible victim, the not greatly sympathetic or sharp public defender, the self-satisfied judge. Narratives of the wrongly convicted are com-

He was drawn not to gangsters, murderers, or thugs, but to those he called 'rascals' — the embezzler, the counterfeiter, the impostor.

family doctor told him he could get up and move about the house. He had stayed indoors for two more days, reading magazines and listening to the radio. He lived with his father and mother, five of his seven brothers, and a sister in a one-family house at 1957 Seventy-ninth Street, Brooklyn. He had a fever blister on the right side of his upper lip and he felt shaky from being in bed so long, but he was glad to get out of the house at last. He went straight to the cafeteria on Twentieth Avenue and Eighty-sixth Street, where he thought he might find some of his friends — clerks, office boys, and such who lived in the neighborhood. He found three or four of them at the cafeteria, as he had hoped, and sat down with them. He drank some coffee and they talked about the hockey matches then going on at Madison Square Garden. He remembers all this distinctly, for it was while he was sitting there in the cafeteria, talking with his friends, that two police detectives came in and arrested him on a charge of first-degree robbery, accusing him of having taken part in a holdup in July, four months before. He remembers the fever blister particularly; it was a singularly unfortunate blemish as things turned out. Although

mon today, but not in 1939 — certainly not ones with the dispassionate rigor of this article. Melodrama is not on McKelway's agenda. He merely wants to show us that, as he writes, the abuse of the judicial system and justice in Caruso's case "may easily be typical of hundreds of other obscure cases which are tried hurriedly, without publicity."

McKelway's most talked-about *New Yorker* contribution wasn't an Annals of Crime piece but a six-part 1940 profile of Walter Winchell, who was then at the apex of his career as the country's most famous and feared gossip columnist. The piece was relatively evenhanded, but McKelway did take it upon himself to fact-check five random Winchell columns. He concluded that of the 131 items in which individuals were named, fifty-four were completely inaccurate, twenty-four were partly inaccurate, and fifty-three were accurate.

McKelway's immediate success at *The New Yorker* was in sharp contrast to Liebling, who had come over at about the same time, from the *World-Telegram*, but hadn't been able to advance past the position of reporter, which at *The New Yorker* meant unbylined researcher.

SECOND READ

IDEAS & REVIEWS

In 1936, Liebling embarked on a long profile of the shady African American preacher and empire-builder Father Divine. It was a great subject, but Liebling got so immersed in reporting the article that, as he later said, it threatened to turn into "a million-word book on comparative religion." At that point, Harold Ross asked McKelway if he would edit it into shape; the piece was published under a double byline and to huge acclaim. Liebling never looked back.

Duly impressed, Ross asked McKelway if he would take the job of *The New Yorker's* first managing editor for fact. The writer agreed, on the condition that he would give up the job after three years. He explained (Brendan Gill wrote in *Here at The New Yorker*) "that he preferred totting up sums not, like most people, in units of two, four, six, eight, and ten but in units of three, six, nine, twelve, and so on." McKelway made much of those three years, solidifying the magazine's fact writing and hiring as reporters such future mainstays as John Bainbridge, Philip Hamburger, and Gill himself. He also tapped another young staff reporter to be his assistant. This was William Shawn, who took his place at the end of the three-year term and went on to be the editor in chief of *The New Yorker* from 1952 to 1987.

Like most members of the *New Yorker* staff, McKelway joined the armed services during World War II. He landed a plum position as an Air Force information officer in the South Pacific and attained the rank of lieutenant colonel, working under General Curtis LeMay. There, his peculiar mental illness possibly first surfaced and certainly first became an obstruction in his life. Shawn described it well in his *New Yorker* obituary of McKelway:

From time to time, he entered what was technically a manic

phase but what he experienced as anything from "feeling good" to boundless euphoria. When he was in such a phase, small writing projects were pyramided into gigantic projects. His thoughts, and his telephone calls, would fly from his office on West Forty-Third Street to the White House, from there to other world capitals, and from there to outer space; then, after a while, he would subside and, again intact in his office, sit back and enjoy an interval of quiet, lucid composition. In retrospect, he looked upon these episodes as adventures, and was able to describe them with humor and detail.

McKelway eventually described in print nearly everything about his malady except the precise diagnosis; a perusal of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* suggests to this layman that it was bipolar disorder combined with mixed non-bizarre delusional disorder and a mild case of dissociative identity disorder.

And so it happened, in any case, that, sitting in his office in Guam, McKelway became convinced that Admiral Chester Nimitz, commander in chief of the Pacific Forces, had made tactical mistakes that in effect sabotaged the B-29 bombing program and amounted to high treason. He locked himself in his quonset hut, composed a long and strident radiogram to this effect, and sent it to the Pentagon. The longtime *New Yorker* contributor and editor Roger Angell, who encountered McKelway during the war, says, "The Pentagon amazingly enough realized what had happened, put a net over him, and put him in Walter Reed Hospital. He worked there for the rest of the war."

As strange as the episode was, possibly even stranger was the fact that McKelway wrote a long *New Yorker* piece about it, published in 1958 under the heading, "That Was a Reporter at Wit's End." And

stranger still was the way he described it with such equanimity and precision. A striking aspect was that, as with some dreams, he half-believed the fantasies and half-realized they were just that. "I got more and more worked up as I wrote," he recalled in the article, "and toward the end the things I said seemed to me muddleheaded if not hysterical." A clue to his compartmentalizing ability was the dissociative identity (sometimes called multiple personality) disorder. He once wrote, "I have pretty much come to the conclusion that I have a great many heads. I've counted and identified twelve separate and distinct heads, or identities, that I know and possess." And so if one of the heads was weaving elaborate fantasies, another could keep it under close observation.

McKelway was handsome, well groomed, and charming, which explains why, by the early fifties, he had convinced five women to marry him. And he was bonkers, which explains why all of those marriages ended in divorce. In 1954 (the same year his only child, a son, died in a helicopter crash), he wed the novelist and *New Yorker* contributor Maeve Brennan; that marriage lasted five years and was his last. Between and sometimes during marriages, McKelway lived in third-tier Manhattan hotels and spent *The New Yorker's* money. That was problematic. Since 1939 he had been a *New Yorker* staff writer, which meant that he was given an office and, instead of a salary, a drawing account, which amounted to advances against future article payments. He was prolific, but he wasn't *that* prolific, so he always owed the magazine money. The amounts ranged from \$7,138.76 in 1954, to \$9,488.03 in 1966, to \$5,357.23 in 1975. The exact figures are preserved in depositions given by *New Yorker* representatives when McKelway's creditors tried to collect their debts through the magazine. The effort was never successful.

Or how, in the face of these internal and external difficulties, he continued to produce outstanding work. In 1962, he wrote a long article for *The New Yorker* called "The Edinburgh Caper"; it was published as a book the same year with the subtitle "A One-Man International Plot." It bears some similarities to the Guam piece, but there, McKelway had a reasonable belief that, in his mind, grew way out of proportion. Here, he takes us step by step through the development of a paranoid delusion. Specifically, while on a trip to Scotland three years earlier, he imagined that he was involved in CIA skulduggery intended to foil a Soviet plot to kidnap Queen Elizabeth and President Eisenhower. Among other things, he fancied he was being sent messages by means of the letters and

his head that this is the expected means of communication — singing excerpts from an Ethel Merman song at the top of his lungs. Not surprisingly, he is arrested, and in his jail cell, in addition to continuing with the Merman song, he shouts out "such phrases as 'Now the Labradors. And now the setters and pointers. And here come the weimaraners.' These seemed to me to represent the different types of Strategic Air Command bombers that were on their way to the rendezvous over Russia." He ends up finding and confiding in the officer, but it turns out the colonel has been in touch with Curtis LeMay, knows all about the "Guam caper," and receives McKelway's allegations in good humor. By that time, the writer's cooler heads are prevailing, and he

in the sixties, of being summoned one Sunday to the Plaza Hotel, where McKelway was making a scene. "Mac had taken a cab to the Plaza, in his pajamas," Trillin says. "When Bob got there, Mac was being obstreperous. The kindest New York cop you'd ever seen was saying, 'Mr. McKelway, why don't you sit down? You'll be more comfortable.' And Mac said: 'Don't try any of your Gestapo tactics on me!'"

At one point, he started scribbling meaningless words and doodles on the eighteenth-floor walls of the *New Yorker* offices. He even got some cartoonists to contribute. "Soon there was an area about fifty feet across, full of graffiti," Trillin says. "I walked in one day and the receptionist told me, 'You may have a problem getting in your office. They're painting.' I said, 'Didn't they paint six months ago?' She said, 'Don't you understand? They're getting rid of Mr. McKelway's wall without hurting his feelings.'"

Such was *The New Yorker*. After 1969, McKelway never wrote another word for publication. He died in January 1980, at the DeWitt Nursing Home in Manhattan. He was fortunate to be memorialized by Shawn, his colleague for forty-six years, and the finest *New Yorker* writer never to have a byline in *The New Yorker*. His unsigned obituary concluded: "McKelway was a born writer and an inspired writer, and he saw the world in his own way and wrote clearly and beautifully about what he saw. He lived his life in a dream, but it was, on the whole, a benevolent dream. We can be grateful that, through his work, he was able to share it with the rest of us." ■

Ben Yagoda directs the journalism program at the University of Delaware and is the author of About Town: The New Yorker and the World It Made and When You Catch an Adjective, Kill It: The Parts of Speech, for Better and/or Worse, which will be published by Broadway Books in February.

'He saw the world in his own way and wrote clearly and beautifully about what he saw.'

— William Shawn

numbers on the license plates of passing cars. Even more so than in the Guam article, McKelway's description of the onset and development of the delusion is compelling because it is so matter of fact. Waking up in his hotel room in Edinburgh, he writes,

a jumble of disturbing thoughts flashed through my head with great rapidity . . . I thought of the Camerons [a pleasant Scottish couple he had befriended] as being somehow menacing. In short, I hated them. It is only to those we love that we turn at unexpected times the gnarled and ugly face of hatred. And in that realm, suspicion readily moves into the space close to our hearts that we thought could be occupied only by trust. These thoughts of mine, you understand, came into my head with terrific speed and were gone in a few seconds, but in those few seconds, I saw Cameron as a Soviet agent of the highest type, and Mrs. Cameron as a co-agent.

He ends up standing outside the hotel where an American officer is staying and — having gotten it into

quickly wraps up loose ends. More than four decades later, "The Edinburgh Caper" remains a unique and riveting work of interior journalism: a book resembling what Joseph Mitchell's *Joe Gould's Secret* might have been had it been written by a lucid Joe Gould.

McKelway had about ten years of lucidity left. He wrote one more *New Yorker* fact piece (a long profile of the greatest impostor in New York history) and more than a dozen elegiac reminiscences and lightly fictionalized sketches describing his early life in Washington, New York, and Bangkok. They included two short stories, "First Marriage" and "The Fireflies," that Shawn described as "among the loveliest the magazine ever published." The manic or delusional episodes became more frequent; according to Roger Angell, "he would go off his medication because he wanted to experience the highs." But he carried them off with style. The late *New Yorker* editor Robert Bingham told Calvin Trillin, who joined the staff

IDEAS & REVIEWS

BOOKS



OWNING UP

A NEW BOOK STOPS SHORT OF DEEPENING THE DISCOURSE ON MEDIA CONCENTRATION

BY MICHAEL SCHUDSON

American democracy is lost unless citizen Davids do battle against the corporate media Goliaths. We have heard this rallying cry before, and we hear it again in Eric Klinenberg's *Fighting for Air*. But Klinenberg, a sociologist at New York University, has humanized and dramatized the argument by writing a book based on extensive original reporting. It is an investigative work, not a rant; it is both intellectually serious and politically passionate, and so it challenges readers like me who have never been much impressed with the claim that media concentration is destroying the Republic.

Fighting for Air, nonetheless, wobbles between analysis and advocacy. Its arguments aren't tested against rival possibilities. Its praise for the activists and academics who have pushed for low-power radio, tangled with the Federal Communications Commission in public hearings, and promoted libertarian policies for Internet governance may be merited, but there is no way to evaluate such praise with the evidence offered. And its historical sense is

limited. Klinenberg doesn't mention past media reformers like Newton Minow, Action for Children's Television, or the educational broadcasters, foundations, and politicians whose efforts in the 1960s created PBS and NPR. Klinenberg writes knowledgeably of past legal challenges to corporate control of broadcasting. Even so, he reports without skepticism the rhetoric of today's media reformers who see their movement as unprecedented. Their enthusiastic rallying of the faithful reads like a public television or radio appeal for funds — we're almost there, a few more pledges before nine o'clock and we'll reach our goal!

Klinenberg is also the author of *Heat Wave*, a stunning study of the failure of the city of Chicago — including its local newspapers and TV — to respond effectively to a crushing hot spell in the summer of 1995. In two weeks, more than seven hundred Chicagoans died from the heat. Many were elderly citizens liv-

ing alone; they were also disproportionately black, disenfranchised by cutbacks in indispensable city services, and disproportionately living in neighborhoods where going to the corner store was not safe (if there was a store left on the corner). *Heat Wave* is a powerful indictment of fiscally responsible but humanly irresponsible urban governance.

Like *Heat Wave*, *Fighting for Air* begins by calling attention to a social breakdown in a time of emergency. Klinenberg takes us to Minot, North Dakota, where, on January 18, 2002, at 1:37 a.m., a railroad car spilled 240,000 gallons of anhydrous ammonia, a highly toxic compound that with limited exposure can burn eyes, skin, and lungs, and with prolonged exposure can paralyze the respiratory system. People should avoid harm by staying indoors or, if exposed and experiencing trouble breathing, by covering their mouths with wet washcloths. Simple measures — but how to get the word out?

Radio is the medium of choice for such a task. Regulated by the FCC, it is supposed to be available for emergency broadcasting. In Minot, however, by 2002 all six local commercial stations were owned by

FIGHTING FOR AIR: THE BATTLE TO CONTROL AMERICA'S MEDIA
by Eric Klinenberg
Metropolitan Books. 352 pp. \$26

Clear Channel Communications, a conglomerate based in San Antonio that owns nearly twelve hundred stations nationwide. The six Minot stations ran prepackaged content and were operated out of two local offices, but efforts to rouse anyone at Clear Channel to interrupt the canned programming failed. Police-override systems, although recently tested, failed as well. The result was one death, three hundred people requiring medical treatment, roughly a thousand people with lingering after-effects from exposure, and many others evacuated from their homes for about six weeks.

Defining the public interest is not easy, but in the Minot saga Klinenberg has effectively identified an unmistakable violation of it: the public interest suffers when a single corporate entity with no visible regard for local communities captures its radio outlets, while the FCC acts as if it has hung a banner over its doorway that reads, "Do tread on me, in fact, please walk all over me." The consolidation and deregulation that allowed locally owned and operated media to become San Antonio clones failed the public good in Minot. The victims? Not diverse or probing media voices — the truth is that local media have rarely offered high-minded or courageous journalism, least of all on the radio. The victim that Klinenberg calls our attention to is localism. Day to day, the localism of radio may not matter much. In an emergency, nothing matters more.

The Minot story is painful to read. How could we have allowed ourselves to get into such a fix? Every legislator in America, and every FCC commissioner, should work to see that local radio will responsibly provide emergency broadcasting.

Klinenberg cultivates the localism theme in successive chapters, with equal fervor but less punch. His chapter on alt-weeklies is a lament about media concentration. He documents how a once lively and competitive marketplace for youth-oriented, irreverent weeklies that pub-

lish significant investigative local stories was slowly tamed by two alt-weekly chains — Village Voice Media and New Times, which merged in 2006. He tells this tale without encouraging the reader to observe that alternative weeklies, regardless of their ownership, occupy a market niche that, New York City aside, did not emerge until the 1960s. Even as alt-weekly consolidation grows, it grows within a sector that simply did not exist forty-

News media miss stories; the reasons don't always involve questions of ownership.

five years ago. Is this an example of frightening concentration or greater diversity? The paradox that must be contemplated is that it is both.

Klinenberg's writing is strongest in bringing alive the originality, enterprise, stumbles, and successes of various grass-roots endeavors. Consider his account of Ginny Welsch, the "veteran radio personality" in Nashville who sought a low-power radio license because "Nashville radio is terrible for local bands, terrible." And there's April Glaser, the "pink-haired teenager with a passion for obscure music" who, at seventeen, became a member of Welsch's executive board; and April's father, who was so moved by her dedication that he purchased land and built a radio tower for the station. The day that "Radio Free Nashville" began broadcasting, Klinenberg was there as a witness, and he movingly describes the opening cry of "Low Power to the People!"

This radio barn-raising exemplifies the great American impulse to speak out and speak up. What's not to admire? It's the energy of democratic renewal that Tocqueville tipped his hat to in the 1830s. Europeans couldn't match it then, nor can they now. We can be glad there is a Radio Free Nashville, and that local musicians get some air time on it, but its birth is a modest triumph, not, as Klinenberg hints, a world historical moment.

Is it a shame that two-, three-, and five-newspaper towns are now one-

newspaper towns? Or that so many of the remaining media companies are publicly traded and not privately held? Yes, but the consequences for news content are not obvious. In his chapter on newspapers, Klinenberg takes a seemingly sensible but unpromising tack: he points to important stories the contemporary press has missed, the implication being that cities and states were better served by the media in 1960 or 1980 than they are today. But yesterday's

more diverse and more locally owned press missed vital stories, too. Localities were not better served by the grand old press of family capitalism in which four out of five publishers preached in 1936 on behalf of Alf Landon and against FDR, that marvelous old press that had more than four hundred correspondents covering Washington, D.C., in 1972 but assigned at most fifteen of them to work full-time on a story called "Watergate" in the months before the 1972 election, that old noble press that repressed unfavorable local news and omitted practically all news about minorities in their communities. The news media, past and present, miss stories, and the explanation doesn't always involve questions of ownership and concentration. Even the BBC, for instance, mostly missed the Holocaust. A media critic must ask what else, besides ownership patterns, matters.

Klinenberg deserves praise for his broad survey of the media — from newspapers and commercial radio to low-power radio, alt-weeklies, and the Internet. Even so, he omits two vital media domains — magazines and books. Both are more diverse, not less, than they were forty or fifty years ago. The original muckrakers of the early 1900s were writers for national, middle-class magazines, liberated by those publications' national advertising and audience

base to muckrake city governments more fiercely than the compromised local newspapers generally dared.

While all media matter, some matter more than others, and for the sake of democracy, print still counts most, especially print that devotes resources to gathering news. Network TV matters, cable

in cities worldwide, and "Baristanet," so named to suggest a virtual coffeehouse, in northern New Jersey. Having given us grounds for Internet hopefulness, Klinenberg then warns that these Web sites primarily serve the affluent at a time of a "deepening digital divide" — but evidence for that "deepening" is not offered. Klinenberg's reporting is,

cultural. Fifth, the degree of consensus in the political elite matters. When there is significant, open disagreement among politicians, the media are empowered and emboldened to report critically; when politicians close ranks, as they did in the early years of the Vietnam War or in the wake of September 11, the media have no constituency for pressing alternative viewpoints.

"I believe in my bones," says the dissenting FCC Commissioner Michael Copps in Klinenberg's concluding paragraph, "that few priorities our country confronts have such long-term effect on our democracy as how America communicates and converses with itself and how this process has deteriorated." "Deterioration" is not the term to apply to radio news when we have enjoyed better service through NPR stations for the past thirty years than ever before; it does not apply to national investigative reporting that is better since the Vietnam years than it ever was before; it does not apply to an Internet that is still building its public affairs muscle in remarkable ways. It's one thing to warn that our structure for public communication is a national resource that should not be squandered; it is another thing to moan that it all just gets worse and worse.

There were five newspapers in Baltimore a century ago when H.L. Mencken began his career in journalism. Of those papers he wrote, "Four of them were cheap, trashy, stupid and corrupt. They all played politics for what there was in it, and leaped obscenely every time an advertiser blew his nose. Every other American city of that era was full of such papers — dreadful little rags, venal, vulnerable and vile." But at least the media were not concentrated! Ownership is important. Ownership is not everything. ■

Michael Schudson teaches journalism at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and is Distinguished Professor of Communication at the University of California, San Diego. His most recent book is The Sociology of News.

What besides ownership matters? There are five likely answers to that question.

TV matters, but when it comes to original investigation and reporting, newspapers are overwhelmingly the most important media. Wall Street, whose collective devotion to an informed citizenry is nil, seems determined to eviscerate newspapers. If we knew how to protect daily newspapers, I doubt there would be many worries about alt-weeklies or low-power radio.

Equally worthy of protection is the freedom of innovation and expression that digital media have thus far provided. This includes not just the Internet but cell phones and digital cameras that can easily transmit images over the Internet. Here the energies of media reformers, whether part of a media reform "movement" or not, are well spent. Klinenberg is insistent that the Internet is not the savior of press freedom, and he judges "the idea that new technology has rendered the dangers of consolidation obsolete" to be "the greatest and most dangerous media policy myth of the digital age."

And yet, good reporter that he is, Klinenberg follows this judgment with notice of e-government Web sites as well as "hyperlocal websites and discussion forums" in middle-class neighborhoods in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere that he praises for "sharing information and reinvigorating collective participation around every conceivable neighborhood issue and event." Particularly interesting is his discussion of youth-oriented sites of local content, including "Gothamist," begun in New York City but since reproduced

again, stronger and more interesting than his ritualistic disgruntlement.

All of this leads back to the key analytical question: what besides ownership matters? There are five likely answers. First, public taste matters. Corporations try to anticipate it and to channel it but they know very well they cannot control it. Second, professional norms, values, and courage matter. Although Wall Street provides the money to operate major media, stock traders and investment bankers do not themselves risk their lives covering Iraq or check the spelling of the name of the murder victim or sit through the city council meeting or track down the expert who might explain cancer clusters or global warming. Journalists who aren't easily pushed around do. Third, public legitimacy matters. Even the major media depend on it and cannot entirely manipulate it; without public legitimacy, they are vulnerable to government regulation, particularly in radio and television, and they are also vulnerable to public disaffection and protest.

Fourth, there is a climate of opinion within which the media operate, to which they are bound, and on which they have only modest influence. Today's climate of opinion is powerfully influenced by science, gives more credence to religion than it once did, tolerates a new coarseness in public expression, accords less deference to conventional authorities and canons, and endorses a view of the United States as multi-

UNDER THE SKIN

A HISTORY OF THE VACCINE DEBATE GOES DEEP BUT MISSES THE DRAMA

BY REBECCA SKLOOT

At this point, it's safe to say, most people in the United States have not been on the receiving end of midnight vaccination raids, with doctors breaking into their homes and jabbing their families with needles. It's been a long time since we saw entire cities flattened by disease. So long, in fact, that lessons from those days seem to have been lost on a few generations.

We're in the midst of a confused national debate over vaccines, with some fearing immunization side effects more than the diseases they fight, and others pushing for more vaccines, at younger ages, and being baffled when parents object. Newspapers report that vaccines may or may not cause autism, autoimmune diseases, and allergies; at the same time, they warn of viral pandemics that can (and do) kill millions, and call for new vaccines to save us (from, say, AIDS, or avian flu). But when those new vaccines arrive and officials say we must give them to our children, we balk. This is nothing new: The vaccine debate has been raging for hundreds of years, because immunizations have a long and complicated history of both saving our lives and hurting us. We needed a book that laid out the history and made sense of it.

There have been at least twenty books on smallpox and polio alone. But until *Vaccine: The Controversial Story of Medicine's Greatest Lifesaver*, by the science journalist Arthur Allen, no book had so carefully and clearly catalogued the history of immunization. And, as Allen writes, "the best way to gain an understanding of why our children [are] vaccinated against particular diseases — and why some people [are] challenging these choices — [is] to delve into the history."

We've seen viruses threaten to wipe out millions (and succeed). Parents have refused immunization, then found themselves with sick and dying chil-

dren, while those doing the immunizing had to pay large sums for damages caused by vaccines that were not properly made or tested. And here's something ironic: when vaccines do their job best, people doubt them most. They start thinking, *Who gets whooping cough anymore? Why should I expose my children to even the slightest risk of vaccine side effects to protect them from a disease no one gets?* Anyone who's ever asked that question should read this book. So should anyone who thinks vaccine doubters are crazy. Because Allen shows that those fears come from real stories of vaccines causing everything from brain damage to tetanus to polio. But more than that, he shows why we have vaccines in the first place, and why it's a bad idea to shun them.

VACCINE: THE CONTROVERSIAL STORY OF MEDICINE'S GREATEST LIFESAVER

by Arthur Allen

W.W. Norton. 512 pp. \$27.95

Allen's book starts in the 1700s, with smallpox and the first immunizations, and ends with the nearly 10,000 lawsuits filed in 2006 claiming vaccine damages. Along the way, he raises important ethical issues (like the role vaccines played in eugenics), and highlights the many ways children bore the burden of that history: their bodies were used to develop and test vaccines (not always ethically); they suffered the injection side effects, and got the diseases when parents refused to immunize them. Allen traces the legal history of vaccine production, from the first lawsuit for damaging side effects to a litigation free-for-all, with companies paying large sums for problems their shots didn't cause. (Covering their losses by raising vaccination costs was easier than fighting in court.)

Much of the material devoted to smallpox and polio has been explored

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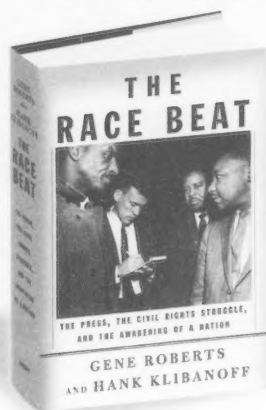
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elsewhere. Allen's truly original contributions come with more recent issues that haven't been widely covered. Whooping cough, for example, lingers in the United States in part because many parents refuse to vaccinate against it. The story that feels largely missing is the new vaccine for strains of the HPV virus, which can cause cervical cancer. HPV is rapidly headed toward as much controversy as any vaccine before it. More, perhaps, since this one — like the vaccine for hepatitis B, which faced similar problems — is a sexually transmitted disease. But Allen makes up for that omission with his detailed coverage of the autism controversy.

He is one of the first authors to

The vaccine-autism theory was, Allen says, "the Pamela Anderson of news stories — dumb, maybe, but oh, so sexy." Not that the media must always agree with science, but it's irresponsible to ignore scientific evidence in favor of a sexy headline, something Allen clearly has not done.

When it comes to modern medicine, there are few topics more dramatic than vaccination. It's a story full of politics, big-business, desperate parents, sick and dying children, conflicts of interest, national security — it even has abortion controversy, since many vaccines are created using cells from

When it comes to modern medicine, there are few topics more dramatic than vaccination.

really delve into the science behind the do-immunizations-cause-autism debate. "No one could deny," he writes, "that autism diagnoses had gone up during a period in which vaccine use was going up." What caused that increase is still unknown. In 1997, a study found that the hepatitis B vaccine contained as much mercury as a can of tuna. That alone may not be toxic, but because of multiple vaccinations, by the age of six months, kids were getting "doses up to 87 times higher than FDA guidelines for the maximum consumption of mercury from fish." Mercury is known to cause brain damage, so no one was wrong to ask what it was (and still is) doing in vaccines. Allen doesn't deny that. But by documenting the science behind the debate, he makes a convincing case against the vaccine-autism theory.

The way Allen sees it, one reason the autism debate still exists, despite evidence against it, is "pseudo-investigative, sensationalist news reporting." He says a "chunk of the news media" continues to hype the story, and he criticizes them sharply for this. (He might well criticize *CJR*. See "Drug Test," November/December 2005.)

aborted fetuses. The subject should be a narrative goldmine.

But unfortunately, for the most part, that drama doesn't come through in *Vaccine*. Its reporting is impressive; there are countless wonderful and often surprising facts that drive the book forward (like companies trying to cover up toxicity problems by spreading out distribution of vaccines, to avoid noticeable clusters of side effects). It's all interesting; it's just hard to wade through.

Vaccine is traditional historic nonfiction writing that lays out the facts. But as I read it, I couldn't help asking myself, *Why write a nonfiction science book like this? Why wouldn't you incorporate narrative into any story that's so potentially rich with it?* Narrative is one of the best tools science writers have for conveying complicated and important information to the general public.

It would be great if all readers loved science for science's sake, but they don't. There's a limited audience for a string of facts about vaccines. But there's no limit to the number of people who want to read a good story. As long as there are characters to latch onto, as long as

there are scenes with action and dialogue, readers will do the work required to understand the science.

How many readers come to John McPhee's writing interested in geology and ecology? Not a lot. But they read, say, his essay "Travels in Georgia" because he follows two wonderful and complex characters who talk funny and collect road kill and sleep next to poisonous snakes and want nothing more than to save Georgia's wilderness from bulldozers. People might pick up Oliver Sacks's *An Anthropologist on Mars* to learn about neurology, but what gets them through the book is an autistic scientist who communicates with animals, and a top neurosurgeon with Tourette's who screams obscenities while ticking his way through delicate brain surgeries without a single slip of the scalpel. Such stories aren't just about keeping readers entertained: they're about showing instead of telling — they illustrate science at work.

People already interested in vaccination will get a lot out of Allen's book. It will educate parents seeking answers. Scientists will enjoy it. But the general public — who may be the audience that needs Allen's book the most — may have a hard time getting beyond the early chapters, which tend toward a blur of information, like this: "A survey of 9,000 American families conducted from 1928 to 1931 found that 26 percent of five-year-olds had been vaccinated. The number jumped to 59 percent by age 7 . . . in cities, where vaccination was a more heavily enforced annoyance, the percentages were 37 and 75 percent, respectively. The last major epidemic, in 1921, brought 102,787 cases and 563 deaths." The outbreaks and deaths blur because they don't happen to characters. They're just numbers.

Which didn't have to be the case. Allen himself proves this late in the book, when he takes a sharp narrative turn and appears as a character. Suddenly, his voice be-

comes absorbing and personal as he tells the story of driving through the hills of Colorado, visiting towns filled with antivaccinators, trying to understand why they resist even though they're some of the only Americans who actually get whooping cough. This is, by far, the book's strongest section.

We meet people like Dawn Winkler, a full-fledged character who believes only inoculated kids throw temper tantrums. We hear her explain her neighbor's child by saying, "she must be vaccinated because every time I see her she has a huge amount of snot on her face." We see her convince many parents not to vaccinate their children though they live in an area with high whooping cough rates (which are largely blamed on not vaccinating). We hear a mother describing her children's infection as "a loud cough that goes down to their toes . . . they cough and cough until they throw up, then they sleep for an hour or two, then they wake up and start all over." But she's glad she didn't vaccinate them, she tells Allen, because she believes shots weaken the immune system.

These stories speak volumes about the vaccination debate. Allen doesn't step in and tell readers, *This is crazy*. He doesn't have to. Readers can decide what they think, because they've seen it for themselves. (In the epilogue, Allen comes across firmly pro-vaccine, but with this caveat: "The history of vaccines has shown that unexpected results are the rule rather than the exception.") The Colorado episode is no less scientific or accurate than earlier parts of the book — and it's clearer because the stories illustrate the science. If Allen had written the whole book with that same voice, and with the same narrative touch guiding us through the thickest of science lessons, it would have helped make his important work accessible to a wider audience. ■

Rebecca Skloot is a freelance writer. Her first book, The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, is forthcoming from Crown.

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BOOK REPORTS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

COUNTRY EDITOR:
HENRY BEETLE HOUGH AND
THE VINEYARD GAZETTE
By Phyllis Méras
Images from the Past
205 pp. \$35, \$21.95 paperbound

Henry Beetle Hough (1896-1985) attained a kind of sainthood among American journalists; a status recognized, for example, when, late in his life, Columbia University gave him an honorary degree, a laurel rarely given to any graduate of its school of journalism. Hough, a native of New Bedford, Massachusetts, indeed graduated from the school and married a fellow student, Betty Bowie. They settled in Martha's Vineyard, the resort island off the south coast of Massachusetts, and bought the *Vineyard Gazette*, a small weekly. They worked on it as long as their lives together lasted, and he continued even after it was sold to the James B. Reston family in 1968. This biography by Phyllis Méras, a journalist who has worked on the *Gazette* and larger newspapers, maintains a very close-up focus on the working and domestic life of Henry and Betty. Their lives were in the literal sense insular; Henry hated to travel and, it appeared, hated change as well, because his life's struggle was to keep the Vineyard as it was — to become, literally, a conservationist. This meant that the newspaper carried on epic struggles, often successfully, with developers, bureaucracies, and even misguided neighbors. Having foresworn children, they were able to find time for Henry to write twenty-seven books, of which the foremost remains the one, written in 1940, that bears the same name as this biography. This book is filled with affectionate



detail; a few clues to its sources would have been helpful.

NEWS OF PARIS: AMERICAN JOURNALISTS IN THE CITY OF LIGHT BETWEEN THE WARS
By Ronald Weber
Ivan R. Dee. 333 pp. \$27.50

How grand to have been a journalist in Paris between the wars! How grand to drink in a country without Prohibition! And to hold the kind of job that allows you to fabricate news occasionally (and drink before or after work). And to sit in the Café le Dôme and rub elbows with, say, Joyce or Hemingway (and drink). Such, it appears from *News of Paris*, was the life of that young American crowd that drifted Franceward after the Versailles conference. Novices or journeymen, male or female, they survived by reporting, writing reviews, editing, or proofreading (and drinking). They received wretched pay in the cramped offices of American journalism's French outposts. There was the old *Herald*, owned after 1924 by the Reid family of the *New York Herald Tribune*; the zany *Tribune*, owned by the strait-laced Colonel Robert R. McCormick of Chicago; a scattering of shorter-lived dailies and magazines. Some of the newcomers worked hard, but one, Harold Stearns, spoke for the majority when he said, "Paris is a

wonderful place in which to loaf, if you also have a regular job." This is a good-old-days kind of book, but the narrative is jumbled, and eventually it is hard to tell who exactly is engaged in which bout of drunkenness or ribald anecdote. Even so, it remains a rich entertainment.

KAY FANNING'S ALASKA STORY: MEMOIR OF A PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING NEWSPAPER PUBLISHER ON AMERICA'S NORTHERN FRONTIER
By Kay Fanning and Katherine Field Stephen
Epicer Press. 255 pp. \$24.95

When she died in 2000, Kay Fanning, whose *Anchorage Daily News* won by a knockout in one of the last competitive newspaper markets in the United States, left an unfinished memoir. Her daughter, Katherine Field Stephen, has tried to finish it by assembling essays from Fanning's colleagues and friends. It's a wonderful story — how Kay and her new husband, Larry Fanning, came to Anchorage in 1967, and two years later bought the decrepit *Daily News*, then running a distant second to the *Times*, the organ of the establishment. Larry died at his desk in 1971, and Kay surprised everybody by becoming publisher and sticking with the *Daily News* until it won a Pulitzer Prize and survived a near-death experience while in a joint operating agreement with the *Times*. Ultimately, she was able to arrange a purchase by the McClatchy group. By the time she left to edit (briefly) *The Christian Science Monitor*, the *Daily News* was on the road to leaving the opposition moribund. The intent behind this tribute is honorable, but the memoir and the accompanying articles leave one hungering for a more coherent picture.

THE RESEARCH REPORT

BY MICHAEL SCHUDSON
AND TONY DOKOUPIL

THE LIMITS OF LIVE

Two recent studies, one American and one British, indict TV news for its growing emphasis on live, unscripted reporting. Fast-breaking, popular, with a contemporary air of informality, such reporting is also measurably thinner, more opinionated, and less densely sourced than other news forms. Typically consisting of anchors (or "presenters" in British parlance) interviewing or chatting with reporters in the field or with experts, these live two-way reports now make up about half the coverage available on U.S. cable news, according to the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), now part of the Pew Research Center (which describes itself as a non-partisan "fact tank") was earlier affiliated with the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

PEJ's 2005 and 2006 "State of the News Media" reports (available at www.journalism.org), find that cable TV news has "all but abandoned what was once the primary element of television news, the written and edited story." In its place is "a journalism of assertion" where reporters perform "off the cuff or from hasty notes" and where "information is disseminated with only minimal attempts to check it out."

The PEJ studies are based on a review of media content in print, TV, radio, magazines, and major online sites. For cable, their approach is layered. For 2005's report, this meant analyzing CNN, Fox, and MSNBC primetime talk, daytime and evening news on twenty randomly selected days. For 2006, they tightened the net with a close analysis of four hours of news on each of the three stations on a single day, May 11, 2005.



In this column, Michael Schudson and Tony Dokoupil will cull current scholarly writing about journalism for fresh ideas that readers of *CJR* might not otherwise chance upon. Suggestions for possible mention are welcome at theresearchreport@cjr.org.

The results indicate that 60 percent of live stories are based on a single identifiable source, and 78 percent include only one side, or mostly one side, of an issue. Forty-seven percent include reportorial opinion — compared to 48 percent for the morning shows on network news and 20 percent for network evening news.

Martin Montgomery, professor of journalism at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland, addresses this cultural shift in the spring issue of *Media, Culture & Society*. He focuses on a close analysis of the case of Andrew Gilligan, the BBC reporter who in 2003 reported allegations that the British government had "sexed up" an intelligence dossier with a claim that Iraq could launch weapons of mass destruction within forty-five minutes. Gilligan's on-air ad-lib included this unsubstantiated remark: "Actually, the government probably knew that that forty-five figure was wrong even before it decided to put it in." The government objected, pandemonium ensued, Gilligan resigned, so did both the BBC's director-general and chairman, and under extraordinary pressure, the BBC

rewrote its editorial policies to minimize the use of live "two-ways" on controversial stories.

Under fire, Gilligan admitted he had made a mistake — but what kind? He said, "... it was a live broadcast and once the words are out of your mouth, the — you know, I did not go back and look at the transcript."

Just Montgomery's point. Trouble ensues when reporters use "a soft discourse for a hard topic." He sees the Gilligan debacle as emblematic of far-reaching changes in public discourse, a product of "pressures towards informality, dialogue rather than monologue, improvisation rather than script." The new style allows correspondents to distance themselves from the facts they report, expressing doubt or skepticism about them, and that may be welcome for the journalist. But it also encourages transmitting suppositions and hunches and the "word-on-the-street" rather than validated facts. With news audiences increasingly difficult to attract, Montgomery warns, "live informality — with all its attendant risks (and precisely because of them) — will continue to surface." And familiar images of a tightly controlled, carefully sourced, vetted, edited TV newsroom will be increasingly out of date.

The studies agree that the new unscripted discourse is part of a broad cultural change. PEJ notes, "Just as 'reality' TV is replacing scripted drama and comedy on the entertainment side, news on TV is also becoming a more extemporaneous medium."

Michael Schudson teaches at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism and in the Department of Communications, University of California, San Diego. Tony Dokoupil is a Ph.D. candidate in communications at Columbia.

IGOR KOPELINSKY

SCENE

The Communist way

BY DUSTIN ROASA

I was accustomed to being censored as an editor, but not as a writer. It pained me that Lam was the one to do it.

Lam was a senior editor at the *Vietnam Investment Review*, the most liberal paper in Vietnam's media world, which is entirely government-controlled. In a year and a half as an editor in Hanoi, I didn't meet a Vietnamese journalist as smart and curious as Lam. Whenever I traveled outside of Vietnam, he asked that I bring back copies of *The New Yorker* and other western magazines that were unavailable there. He often spoke wistfully of a journalism conference he had attended several years before at Columbia University. "Lam gets it. He's not like all of the others," said Emma, a fellow editor from New Zealand, over beers one night at a dingy backpacker bar.

The article in question was a profile I had written of a Vietnamese musician named Minh. Because he incorporated European styles into his work, Minh was in controversial territory with the country's cultural authorities, who insisted that art be as "Vietnamese" — and free of foreign influence — as possible. To me this was censorship disguised as national pride. I chose to write about Minh precisely because he was so unconcerned with tailoring his music to fit Vietnam's musical traditions. The problem with my story, however, was not the subject matter. Lam was worried about one word.

"You cannot say 'Communist,'" he said. "It is too sensitive. The authorities will not like it."

I paused, caught off guard and feeling a little precious about my writing. "But this is how the musician explained things," I said. It was true. The sentence — "Minh learned music the Communist way, through



A street vendor in Hanoi

repetition and emulation" — described his time in Vietnam's state-run conservatories. It was important to the story.

Lam looked down at the paper, surprised to see me putting up a fight.

"Will it change the meaning of the sentence if we take these words out?" he asked, pointing to "the," "Communist," and "way."

I thought about it for a moment.

"Well, yes," I said. I wasn't trying to be difficult, but taking out those three words would render the sentence meaningless. I told him so. We sat in uncomfortable silence for a moment.

"Is there another word we can use?" he suggested, finally. We pretended to

think about it, but both of us knew what the outcome would be.

As we stood there, I grew angry. Not, I realized, at Lam. Instead, I was mad that two people who should have been on the same side were being compelled by circumstances to act as adversaries. Lam was forced to argue for something he didn't believe, while I, from a position of relative safety as a foreigner, was forced to pressure him to do something that could get him into serious trouble. Meanwhile, the offsite censors — who had the final say on everything we printed — didn't have to risk anything. It was up to Lam and me to fight it out, but neither outcome was really worth fighting for. A win for Lam meant a victory for censorship; a win for me meant endangering one of the few people who might someday make a difference in Vietnamese journalism.

"Okay, take it out," I said.

Lam sighed audibly, with relief. **WR**

Dustin Roasa is a writer who lives in New York City.

The Lower case



AP PHOTO/MARTA LAVANDIER

North Korea Tests Long-Range Missile

The Washington Post 7/5/06

Judge debating state execution procedure respected by lawyers

San Francisco Chronicle 9/26/06

Police are searching for baby motorist found bleeding next to highway and his mother

San Jose Mercury News 8/10/06

Voters flock to the poles

The Lusk (Wyo.) Herald 11/8/06

Akron capital to tire people

Akron (Ohio) Beacon Journal 9/12/06

Wednesday's Question:

Should all area high schools switch to a trimester system?

Yes

No

9%

5%

14 Total Votes

Muskegon (Mich.) Chronicle 4/6/06

Woman to hang over Jordan bombings

Aljazeera.net 9/23/06

Sandal rocks GOP House leadership

The San Diego Union Tribune 10/3/06

"A real treat"

"A real treat: One week's engagement gave me a year full of story ideas."
—Carol Rosenberg, *The Miami Herald*

"The most relevant"

"... the most relevant and useful training program I've ever attended."
—Clinton Griffiths, KWCH-TV News, Wichita, Kan.

"Impressive"

"... an impressive array of experts ... valuable background knowledge and inspiration ..." —Audrey McAvoy, *The Associated Press*, Honolulu

"Go. Learn. Grow."

—Al Hunter Jr., *Philadelphia Daily News*

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